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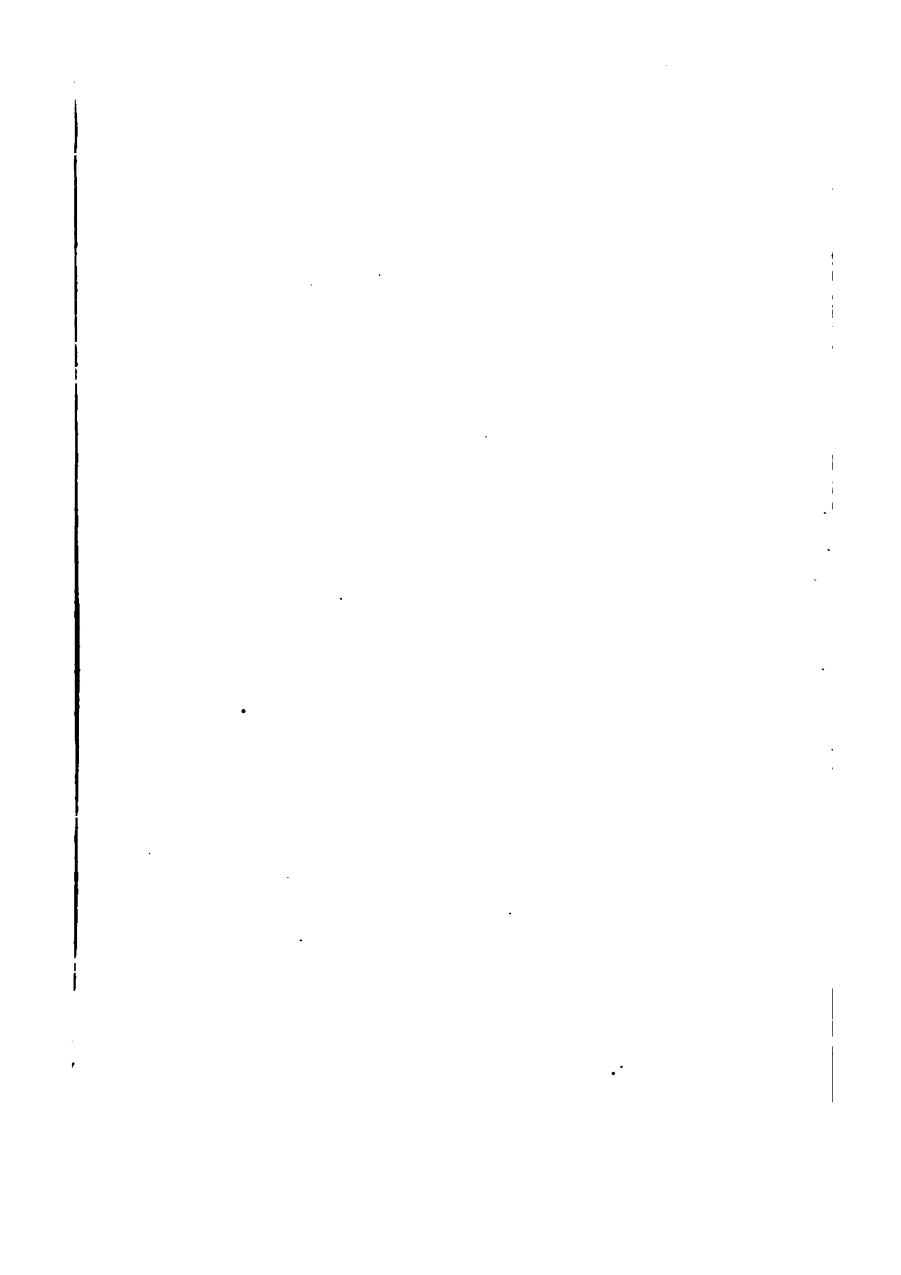


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NATHALIE BY JULIA KAVANAGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



# NATHALIE;

A TALE.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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## P R E F A C E.

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THE singular interpretations to which works of fiction are sometimes subject, render a Preface a matter of necessity.

In writing the following tale, I think it, therefore, necessary to state that I had no other definite object in view than to draw two very opposite characters, and show as truthfully as I could how those characters attracted, repelled, and influenced each other. I by no means intend to imply that these pages contain no other moral; I hope they do: but I cannot claim the merit of having made any peculiar moral my aim. A moral, unless when based on a very broad truth, seldom fails to prove fatal to works of art.



Such being the case, I make no apology for having chosen two very imperfect characters for my heroine and hero. I am too well aware of their deficiencies to imagine that they run any chance of being considered as models, or even of being mistaken as embodiments of the author's conceptions of moral beauty.

J. K.

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# NATHALIE.

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## CHAPTER I.

“BRING in the light, and tell Mademoiselle Nathalie that it is my desire to speak to her instantly.”

Mademoiselle Dantin uttered her commands in a sharp, imperative tone. A timid-looking servant, in conical Norman cap, and short petticoats of startling fulness, vanished as if to hear were to obey, and the old schoolmistress stiffly sank back in her chair, with arms folded on her breast and a frown upon her brow.

It was a chill Norman evening—almost cool enough for England, and, in the deepening twilight, the room looked well-nigh dark. Through the narrow panes of a low glass door penetrated a faint gleam of lingering light, and the shadowy outlines of a few tall trees were dimly visible in the garden beyond. Thus seen, without light or fire, in the gathering gloom of evening, with pale maps and shadowy globes, long sombre curtains, and stiff straight-backed chairs, the apartment looked most comfortless; but the withered features and rigid figure of Mademoiselle Dantin made her look by far the most dreary object it contained.

She was thin, wrinkled, and hard-favoured; she wore no amiable look, nor was she very amiable in reality; being dogmatic and imperious, she rather liked teaching; it was power — authority, and turned out,

moreover, to be as good a way as any of fastening her own peculiar opinions — more strongly marked than varied — on others. But then, as misfortune would have it, she had a decided antipathy to children and young girls, so that between her delight in the tuition and her general aversion for the objects taught — an aversion which, as usual, was most heartily returned — Mademoiselle Dantin and her pupils had rather an uncomfortable life of it, and might not have got on at all, had there happened to be another school and school-mistress in the town of Sainville.

Sainville — we cannot advise the reader to look for it on the map — is a quiet little place buried in the very bosom of Normandy. This province is perhaps the prettiest, and certainly is the greenest nook in all the pleasant land of France. It has many low hills, many shallow little valleys, with bright glancing streams and a clear blue sky; above all, it has picturesque old towns of quaint and venerable aspect, that seize on the imagination with a peculiar and mysterious charm. Dark, lonely, and rather misanthropic-looking, these quiet places contrast strikingly with the cheerful verdure and soft pastoral beauty of the surrounding scenery; they look like morose hermits, who have at least chosen pleasant spots wherein to do penance. But though their quaintness strikes the eye, and their monastic gloom awakes the fancy, they are cold and cheerless — they cannot win the heart; we feel that their life glides away in too dull and monotonous a flow; we look, wonder, linger for a while in narrow, winding streets, with crazy wooden houses rising high on either side, and then pass on, feeling we have left a human prison behind us.

Sainville was one of those little moral islands; it had no trade, no commerce, no life; and was, moreover, shut out from the great and busy world by a barrier of aristocratic châteaux rising on the slope of the surrounding declivities, or enjoying the shade and silence of the neighbouring valleys. In these luxurious abodes, life was as gay and pleasant as heart could wish, and some of the best of French society could make it. Balls, plays, concerts, fishing excursions, and hunting parties, seemed to be ever renewing for the amusement of the privileged owners and guests of the châteaux. Many a time did the inhabitants of Sainville, who all belonged to the smaller bourgeoisie, and who had not wealth, importance, or talent to rise above their station, comment, with the puritanic severity of the excluded, on the sin and folly transacted in those abodes whence ever proceeded the sounds of merriment and pleasure; and many a time did they grumble more morosely still, when wakened in the early morning by some gay cavalcade clattering away along the silent streets.

This exclusion, in which she shared like her fellow citizens, had not improved the mind or temper of Mademoiselle Dantin. She had accustomed herself to think of nothing save her school, its propriety, its ceremonious routine, above all its immaculate purity; and on this subject she had grown to be somewhat severe and irritable. She was so in a peculiar degree on the day when this story opens. This was, however, a day which generally found and left her in a singular state of good humour, being neither more nor less than that appointed for the annual distribution of prizes among her pupils. On the morning of this

eventful ceremony the room had been hung with white draperies, ornamented with green wreaths. Mademoiselle Dantin opened the proceedings by seating herself on a sort of throne erected at the upper end of the room, from which elevated position she looked down triumphantly on the curled heads and white robes of the pupils, who demurely sat in rows in the centre of the apartment, whilst their friends and relatives formed a semicircle around them. After making a little speech, Mademoiselle Dantin, holding an eyeglass in her right hand, and a paper in her left, sententiously read aloud the names of the pupils on whom she had resolved to confer the distinction of a prize. Each of the girls thus designated then left her place and walked up to a tight, lively-looking little gentleman, in a dark wig, the professor of dancing, who sat alone between two tables, one covered with books, the other with wreaths, took from his hands the volume adjudged to her, and stooped to receive the laurel wreath which, with prompt and courteous grace, he rose to place on her head, whilst delighted papas and mammas shed tears, and Mademoiselle Dantin looked on and felt in her glory. When there were no more prizes or wreaths to give, Mademoiselle Dantin rose, and the company dispersed, the children all going home for their holidays. As soon as every one had departed, the schoolmistress gave prompt orders for the taking down of hangings and wreaths: in a few minutes all was over; the room was empty, the walls were bare, and the school, instead of being filled with the murmuring hum of pupils conning over their lessons, fell into a deep and unnatural stillness, destined to last six weeks. But though the ceremony had

passed off in the best possible manner, the triumph of this day was soon clouded by a discovery which filled the mind of the schoolmistress with indignant wrath. What that discovery was will be seen farther on.

A few minutes had elapsed since she had, in a tone of ominous severity, given, with regard to the appearance of "Mademoiselle Nathalie," the order recorded in the first lines of this chapter, when the door of the room where she sat opened, and Marianne, the servant, entered, bearing a lighted tallow candle in an old plated candlestick, which she placed on the table before her mistress.

"Well?" observed Mademoiselle Dantin, with inquiring sharpness.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie is not in her room," was the low reply.

"Not in her room! and what is she allowed a room of her own for unless to be in it?" exclaimed the schoolmistress, with subdued irritation.

"Perhaps she is gone to breathe a little fresh air in the garden," timidly suggested Marianne.

"Not at this hour, Marianne," majestically replied Mademoiselle Dantin; "no, I will not admit that any member of my establishment, however faulty in other respects," she feelingly added, "could, against my well-known rule, be out in the garden at this hour."

"Shall I go and see, Madame?"

"No, Marianne, I cannot allow that; to allow it would be to admit such a thing as possible, and this I never will; look for her in the class."

Marianne silently left the room, but the door did not close behind her. For the head and wig of the

"Professor" who had played so important a part in the morning's ceremony, suddenly made their appearance in the dark aperture, smiled and nodded at Mademoiselle Dantin with mingled familiarity and respect, and lisped in a tone of soft entreaty: "May I come in?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Chevalier, you may come in," replied the schoolmistress, half rising from her seat; her tone was gracious and mollified, and a faint smile passed over her faded face. Thus encouraged, the Chevalier, a middle-aged little man with a thin, sallow visage, quick eyes, and an aquiline nose, entered the room with erect bearing and elastic tread. He was proceeding to shut the door with a prompt decision natural to him, when Mademoiselle Dantin shook her head, and admonishingly observed:

"The door, Monsieur le Chevalier."

"Ah! yes, the door," he sighed, and left it open.

"Rules must be obeyed," continued the schoolmistress.

"Yes, rules must be obeyed," answered the Chevalier, repressing a shiver as the keen draught came full upon him.

It was a rule in Mademoiselle Dantin's establishment, for no lady to converse with a gentleman, not her father or brother, in a closed room. The mistress was the first to set the example, and obey the rule in all its severity. To say the truth, she generally sat facing the door; and the male visitor, whoever he might be, had his back turned to it, so that all the hardship of this rule could not be said to fall upon her; but what gentleman would complain, when feminine modesty was at stake? assuredly not so devoted

a squire of dames as the Chevalier Théodore de Méranville-Louville.

No mummary ever yet existed without some special adviser or other in male shape, and what a father confessor might have been to an abbess and her gentle sisterhood, the Chevalier was to Mademoiselle Dantin and her fair pupils. He was the only individual of his sex attached to the establishment, for the salic law still holds good with regard to the tuition of dancing. To this law Mademoiselle Dantin, who, if she could, would have effaced the masculine gender from dictionary and grammar, very indignantly submitted. But the gentle blood of the Chevalier, who, though of an impoverished family, had an authentic claim to the noble names he bore, and his title of Knight of the Legion of Honour, bestowed upon him for saving a drowning man, but which many considered a government reward for his invention of a new *pas*, called the Sainville *pas*, a rumour he rather favoured — above all, his chivalrous devotedness to the fair sex, had conquered the antipathy and subdued the obdurate heart of the schoolmistress. Woman was indeed sacred as woman to the gallant little Chevalier; he cherished a platonic and universal passion for the whole sex, and revered a petticoat in its earliest and latest stages; he believed neither in little girls nor in aged dames; he took off his hat to young ladies of six, and flirted with ladies of sixty, and did both with equal grace. But though thus gentle to those whom he called “earthly angels,” the Chevalier was to his own sex stern and somewhat haughty.

Having taken the seat which Mademoiselle Dantin condescendingly designated, the Chevalier could not



but notice the gloom which overshadowed the features of the fair schoolmistress. In a neat little speech, he immediately expressed his sympathy with the regret she naturally felt at the temporary separation between herself and her beloved pupils. Mademoiselle Dantin tossed her head.

"As if I cared for the little flirts!" she said, almost indignantly.

The Chevalier looked distressed. Flirts! there were no flirts in his creed.

"A set of forward coquettes!" continued she.

"Oh! Madame!" he exclaimed, raising his hands imploringly.

"And of deceitful minxes, as all girls are," she persisted.

The Chevalier was shocked. He gently endeavoured to remonstrate, and ventured to remind her, "That though women were tender flowers at every age, they were frail, very frail rosebuds in their youth."

"Well, then, one of the rosebuds is going to get a nipping," retorted Mademoiselle Dantin, looking as dark and chill as a wintry breeze.

She rang the bell as she spoke, and Marianne promptly made her appearance.

"Is Mademoiselle Nathalie coming or not?" asked the schoolmistress.

"Yes, Madame; she said she would come directly."

"Pray where did you find her?"

The girl hesitated.

"In the garden, reading," she replied at length.

Mademoiselle Dantin rose.

"Chevalier," she said, with great state, "be good enough to leave me. I have a duty to perform; -- an

act of justice and authority to exercise. I must be alone."

The Chevalier rose, looked dismayed, but retired on tiptoe, without so much as remonstrating. He knew that Mademoiselle Dantin's justice was always administered privately, and with a strictness of secrecy that, like the Vehmgericht, only rendered it more awful to the apprehension of the uninitiated.

"What has our pretty southern flower done?" he poetically inquired, as Marianne closed the door and followed him out; but the girl only shook her head in reply, and seemed struck with consternation.

As soon as she was alone, Mademoiselle Dantin walked up to the glass door that led into the garden, and stood there for a few seconds, peering through the narrow panes with sharp attention. There was a peculiar smile on her face as she turned away and resumed her seat. Scarcely had she done so when the glass door opened. The schoolmistress heard it very well, but did not choose to look up; a light step glided in, still she remained motionless and grim, looking straight before her. It is the culprit that must seek the glance of the judge, and not the judge that must look at the culprit. Mademoiselle Dantin was a true Normande, litigious in spirit, and versed in legal knowledge; besides the rules which she mercilessly imposed on others, she had certain rules for her own use, which she rigidly obeyed: one of these rules was to give a judicial form to almost everything she did.

"Did you wish to speak to me, Madame?" asked a clear, cheerful voice at her elbow.

The schoolmistress made no reply, but slowly raised her head, and turned it with a keen and severe

glance in the direction whence the voice had proceeded. A handsome, slender girl of seventeen or eighteen years of age, very simply attired in black, but dark-haired, dark-eyed, and with animated features of southern symmetry, was standing by her side. This was Nathalie Montolieu, chief and only resident teacher in the establishment of Mademoiselle Dantin.

She was scarcely above the middle height of woman, but of a light and erect figure. Freedom and careless grace marked her look, her bearing, and her attitude, even whilst she stood there quietly by the chair of the old schoolmistress. As she turned slightly to hear Mademoiselle Dantin's expected reply, with an air too easy to be dignified, but not free from the quick, impatient pride of youth, the light which fell full on her whole person, leaving all dark behind it, gave to the outline of her graceful figure, and to her clear and well-defined profile a vivid distinctness, still further heightened by the shadowy background of the ill-lit room. The brow open and poetic, with wavy hair braided back; the dark eyes soft and deep through all their fire; the short upper lip and curved chin told a daughter of the sunny south; and the innate southern grace of her half-averted head and listening attitude, would have been the very desire of a sculptor's eye. Yet hers was not the still beauty of cold art; it had the light from within which is to a countenance as is the lambent flame to the alabaster lamp in which it burns; the warm ray which reveals, though it may not create, its beauty. And in her that ray seemed, from the ever-varying expression of her mobile features, to burn with a light as changeful as it was clear. She had not the soothing and almost divine calm of perfect

loveliness. Her beauty charmed because it was so human with the light and bloom of youth, and all the genial warmth of her ripening years. It was neither serene nor angel-like, but fervent and living; not ideal though highly poetic.

Indeed, to look upon her as she stood there, to see her intelligent forehead and arched eyebrows, to meet her look, gentle though fearless, and seldom veiled by drooping eyelids, to mark the flexibility, denoting both courage and a temper easily moved, of her delicately chiselled features, above all to note the light, capricious smile of her sensitive and half-parted lips, — those lips of the south averse to silence, and which express so quickly and so significantly frankness, impatience, good-humoured raillery, or angry disdain, — was to know her as one in whom blended both the highest and the weakest attributes of an imaginative and impulsive woman; from the energy, passion, and devotion of the heart to the caprice and endless mobility of temper destined to render life as changeful as an April day.

“Did you wish to speak to me?” she asked again, in a quick, impatient tone, which rendered the fulness of her southern voice and its rapid accent still more apparent.

She glanced down somewhat impatiently as she spoke, and the life and warm colouring of her whole countenance contrasted strikingly with the stony look and pale, rigid features of Mademoiselle Dantin.

“I did wish to speak to you; I sent for you for that express purpose, and you will soon know why,” replied the schoolmistress, in the long, nasal drawl of Normandy; “but first, may I ask why, against my

express rule, you were out in the garden at this late hour?"

"I did not think the rule applied to the holidays," quietly replied the young girl.

"Then I beg to inform you that it does."

An expression of much annoyance passed over the features of Nathalie, but she subdued it, and merely said, "Very well, Madame."

"Indeed," resumed Mademoiselle Dantin, "I think it strange that you should like the garden at this hour, and I should feel inclined to make some remarks on the subject, did I not remember that as a Provençal, that is to say, a native of that southern part of France which has never been remarkable for the observance of feminine propriety, you are entitled to indulgence."

A kindling light passed in the dark eyes of the southern girl, but the schoolmistress never noticed it, and resumed in the same ceremonious, legal tone:

"May I ask what you were doing in the garden at this late hour?"

"I was reading."

"Some pernicious romance, of course. Must I ever keep telling you that it is dangerous and improper to feed your mind with the absurdities which abound in such works? Must I keep assuring you that no character is so ridiculous as that of a romantic young lady?"

"Romantic!" echoed Nathalie, with a gesture of impatience; "and what has one in my position to be romantic about, Madame? The realities of my life are surely sufficient to drive all romance away."

"True. Besides, you are so sensible and so prudent. Will you favour me, however, with the name of the book you were reading?"

"It was a very harmless book."

"Was it a fiction?"

"An innocent one at least."

"Which was, of course, the reason why you hid it in your pocket before coming in?" said the schoolmistress, closing up her thin lips with an ironical smile, and triumphantly straightening her meagre neck.

Nathalie gave her a quick look, dropped her eyes, and smiled demurely.

"I assure you, Madame," she slowly observed, "that the book is a harmless book. Interesting, however, for the character of the hero, though somewhat stern, is original and striking. I confess I like him; the whole story is, no doubt, melo-dramatic, but —"

"How did you get it?" interrupted Mademoiselle Dantin, with a sort of sudden jerk in her look and speech, which she held infallible for the detection of deceit.

"I found it in the garden, where it had been left by one of the pupils," quietly answered the young girl.

"One of the pupils? Good Heavens! And this is what goes on in spite of all my vigilance. Give me that book, Mademoiselle Montolieu; give me that book," she repeated, with a sort of desperate calmness that seemed to say she was quite ready to obtain it, no matter what the cost might be.

Nathalie smiled again, this time rather scornfully,

but the book was produced and laid on the table. Mademoiselle Dantin took up the volume, drew the light nearer, looked, and laying down the book, gave the young teacher a glance of indignant wrath.

The dangerous fiction was a volume of romantic fairy tales. Nathalie's face beamed with pleasure and mischief as she met Mademoiselle Dantin's look of exasperation; but the lady soon recovered, and merely observed in a sharp key:

"I really wonder, Mademoiselle Montolieu, you will persist in losing your time with such foolish reading."

"I took up the book by chance. I fell on a story which, I acknowledge it, interested me. The chief character, though dark, is not without a mysterious power of attraction."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," inquired the school-mistress, with slow and dignified amazement, "do you imagine I asked you to come here in order to hear your opinion of a fairy tale? You are guilty of the strangest absurdities! I suppose ladies in the south talk in that heedless, flighty manner. Remember that in Normandy it will not do. I beg, therefore, that you will — if it is indeed possible — restrain your southern vivacity for a few moments. May I ask if you remember the conditions we made when you entered this house three years ago?"

"I remember. I was to teach French, music, geography."

"I do not speak of that."

"History, arithmetic, &c., for the sum of three hundred francs a year."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, you wilfully misunderstand me."

"Board and lodging included."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu!" exclaimed the schoolmistress, folding her arms, "will you be so good as to remain silent."

Nathalie looked all innocence, but a furtive smile lurked around the corners of her mouth.

"If I spoke, Madame," she composedly replied, "it was because you asked if I remembered the conditions."

"I alluded to moral conditions; not to those paltry conditions of money, board, and lodging, on which your mind is always running."

"And yet, Madame, you say I am romantic."

"The moral part which passed between us when you entered this house three years ago," resumed Mademoiselle Dantin, without heeding the young teacher's last remark, and closing her eyes to speak with more effect, "related to the morality, the propriety, the purity, —"

"I think I had better take a seat to hear you," quietly observed Nathalie, and she took one as she spoke, seating herself so as to receive the full benefit of the awful glance the schoolmistress immediately directed towards her. But the young girl, leaning her elbow on the table, and resting her chin on the palm of her left hand, eyed her stern mistress without impertinence, though very composedly. Her look, always expressive, was now particularly so; it said in plain language: "I have been called in for a quarrel — I know it — I am used to it; I have tried to avoid it, but since I cannot, go on; I am ready."



Mademoiselle Dantin resumed:

"The moral part or series of moral conditions — I hold part to be quite as correct an expression, but shall use 'series' for the sake of clearness — the series of moral conditions I alluded to bore reference to the propriety, the purity, the womanly reserve of your conduct."

"In what have I failed?" asked Nathalie, with an impetuosity that showed patience did not rank amongst her peculiar virtues.

"Strict womanly propriety and discretion," continued the schoolmistress, "were to be your chief attributes. Without modesty —"

A flush crossed the brow of Nathalie; her voice trembled as she spoke:

"Your hints are becoming insulting. Madame, beware!"

"If you had condescended to hear me to the end," said Mademoiselle Dantin, with irritating coolness, "there would have been no necessity for this unfeminine burst of temper. And this reminds me of another remark I wish to make to you: you are in Normandy, not in Provence; pray remember it. You must please to drop that rapid and startling mode of speech, to talk a little lower, to laugh less, and to keep your southern blood and temper rather more under your control. What may have been only an agreeable vivacity in your native province, is unlady-like and repulsive here."

Nathalie eyed her very quietly.

"You were talking about modesty," she said, in a tone calm enough for the most phlegmatic Normande.

"I was, and if you will be so good as not to in-

interrupt me, I mean to give you a definition of that virtue. Modesty I conceive to be the strict guard which a woman of principle keeps over her looks and demeanour with persons of the opposite sex. In that reserve you have failed."

"How so?" asked Nathalie, whose voice had already lost some of its calmness.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," frigidly observed the schoolmistress, "I have begged, I now implore you not to interrupt me. I will tell you how you have failed: you are vain; you think yourself handsome; you flirt, as well as you can, with every man you meet. Oh! you need not give me that basilisk look; it is so. Your alluring ways in a certain quarter have not escaped me. If you were only ambitious, I should not mind; but the immodesty of the thing revolts me."

"For heaven's sake, Madame," exclaimed Nathalie, tapping her foot with uncontrollable impatience, "be so good as to say at once the ill-natured thing you have been aiming at all along."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," reproachfully said the schoolmistress, "have you really no idea of that beautiful feminine composure which subdues the manifestation of everything approaching emotion? If you would only remember that the most bitter quarrel can and ought to be conducted like a logical discussion; if, instead of speaking in that vehement way, you had only said quietly, 'Will you be so good, Madame, as to come to the point?' or something of the kind. Mademoiselle Montolieu," she feelingly added, "there is a form in everything, and your want of form will break my heart."

She looked and felt distressed. If she tormented

Nathalie, the young teacher certainly tormented her almost as much. They were antipathetic by nature, temperament, and birth; theirs was the old quarrel of the northern and southern races, — a quarrel which has endured for ages, and will endure ages still. The schoolmistress kept the teacher because she was full of intelligence and talent, and much loved by the pupils; the teacher remained because she was poor and needed a home. The Dantin discipline had failed to subdue her vivacity of spirit and temper; she was still the gay and yet ardent Provençal girl, with all the fire and impulsiveness of her race. But though to others she might seem like the beauties of a kindred land, with

Heart on her lips and soul within her eyes,  
Soft as her clime, and sunny as her skies;

the unhappy schoolmistress, who felt like the keeper of some young and half-wild thing, unhesitatingly pronounced her a proud, passionate, vindictive southern, who would never know anything about the beauties of feminine propriety.

After a moody pause, she now abruptly observed:

“May I ask how long you have been acquainted with our neighbour?”

“What neighbour?” inquired Nathalie, with evident surprise.

“Our next-door neighbour. I ask you how long you have been acquainted with him?”

“I have seen him at a distance, but never spoken to him. I think your question strange.”

“No matter. Will you be good enough to be frank for once, and tell me what you know of our neighbour?”

Nathalie looked irritated beyond measure at this pertinacity, but she controlled herself, and replied:

"I know nothing of Monsieur de Sainville, save that he is, as you say, our next-door neighbour, — a gentleman of ancient birth and large property. I have seen him once or twice at a distance, and should not even know him again; I care nothing about him. I scorn your insinuations."

Her face grew flushed as she spoke.

"She scorns my insinuations!" ejaculated the schoolmistress; "scorns what insinuations?" she added, resignedly. "I am not aware I made any with regard to Monsieur de Sainville."

Nathalie looked round, to see her better.

"On whom, then," she abruptly said, "do you accuse me of practising my powers of seduction?"

"Your powers of seduction!" indignantly echoed Mademoiselle Dantin, who detected the disdainful curl of the lip with which the words had been uttered; "I certainly did not accuse you of practising what you thus unblushingly allude to on Monsieur de Sainville, — a grave, experienced man, on whom girlish arts or graces are not very likely to take effect. I was not alluding to him, though of course you did not know this, but to his nephew, — Monsieur Charles Marceau."

"Oh! his nephew," slowly repeated Nathalie.

"Yes; but of course you do not know him; of course you have never seen or met him, though he lives next door; of course you do not linger in the garden in the evening in order to be seen or admired by him — oh, no!"

"I was not prepared," ironically replied Nathalie,

"to find my evening walks thus interpreted; but let it be a comfort to you to reflect that the garden-wall is high enough in all reason to protect M. Charles Marceau."

"You need not say that with that triumphant look," returned the schoolmistress, fairly exasperated; "your beauty is not quite so dangerous as all that; as for garden-walls, their height is of little consequence when servants can be bribed to convey messages or letters."

"Madame," said Nathalie, in a low tone, "I am not patient by nature; I believe you know it; I warn you that on some points, and this is one, I will not be patient. I exact that you unsay what you have said, or give me proof that it is true."

She spoke in a subdued key, but with more real anger and haughtiness than she had yet displayed.

"Proof," answered Mademoiselle Dantin, with a smile of conscious triumph; "pray what do you call this?"

She drew forth a letter from her pocket as she spoke, placed it on the table before Nathalie, and significantly laid the forefinger of her right hand upon it, like one who had all along been preparing her little *coup de théâtre*, and knew its value well.

Nathalie looked surprised, but took up the letter and read it without any apparent sign of emotion.

"Well," said she, coolly laying it down again, "what about that letter, Madame?"

Mademoiselle Dantin clasped her hands, turned up her eyes, and shook her head.

"The next thing," said she, with wrathful calmness, "will be that you will declare your right to

receive such letters. Or maybe I do you injustice, maybe you do not see the impropriety, because your extreme innocence prevents you from understanding such matters. Poor little thing! she reads fairy tales in the garden."

Nathalie eyed her with a firm, clear glance.

"My innocence," said she, very calmly, "is guarded by something more powerful and secure than ignorance. I for one shall not feign to misunderstand that which is as clear as day. By sight, at least, I know well the person who wrote this letter; the nephew of our proud neighbour. I have met him not once but many times. He has followed me when I have gone to see my sister Rose, down in Sainville, and he has stood at a distance when I took the pupils for a walk on the road to Marmont. When I have been in the garden of this house, he has generally been on the terrace of his uncle's garden by which it is overlooked. I confess that I have not given up going to Sainville, or walking into the country, protected by the presence of twenty persons. I have not given up walking in the garden protected by a substantial wall. And now, Madame, you know as much as I do of the encouragement given by me to this M. Charles Marceau, who, after honouring me with impertinent attentions, honours me with a still more impertinent declaration of what I must, I suppose, call his love."

"At which I dare say you felt very much offended when you received it," sneered Mademoiselle Dantin.

"It is no doubt very presumptuous for me to be offended at anything," replied Nathalie, with some bitterness, "but that is not the question. When I asked for proofs of your accusations, you produced

this letter. You now say, 'When you received it,' I beg to say that I received it from your hands for the first time."

"I found it in your room, in your drawer," said the schoolmistress, severely.

"And pray," asked Nathalie, angrily, looking up, "what took you to my room, or made you look into my drawers?"

For a moment Mademoiselle Dantin seemed embarrassed, but for a moment only.

"It was my duty," she confidently replied; "I suspected, I knew there was something wrong."

"But the letter was sealed; you broke the seal, and accuse me of having read it first. I do not mean to say that I should not have read it, but I would have mentioned the matter to you to complain of the insolent servant who had become the messenger of this vain and presumptuous young man."

"Admitting that you have not read this letter," inflexibly resumed the schoolmistress, "it is still disgraceful to have received it. Such a thing never before happened in my establishment. This letter would never have been addressed to a strictly modest female. Men, bad as they are, do not act without some encouragement. But there are artful, designing creatures, ever ready to draw into their nets any silly young man of family and fortune. I owe it to the character of my house to suffer no such persons in it. I consent to bury the past in oblivion," she added, with a magnanimous bend of the head; "but on the express and clearly understood condition, that certain individuals I need not mention by name, will henceforth observe that purity and reserve which ought to

characterize their sex. Should this timely hint fail in its effect, a disreputable dismissal must inevitably be the consequence. Such were the remarks I wished to offer to you, Mademoiselle Montolieu. And now I have a few accounts to settle, you may retire."

Nathalie rose, her slender figure was drawn up, her cheeks crimsoned with shame, then grew pale with indignant anger; her dark eyes were dilated and flashed proudly; her lip curled with disdain; ire was in her bearing, her accent, and her look as she spoke.

"Madame!" said she, with the passionate vehemence natural to her, and which she now no longer strove to repress, "I have resided three years under your roof; I have during that time been tasked beyond endurance, — been daily insulted and oppressed. Never, however, did you dare to venture so far as you have ventured to-day. I scorn your insinuations: they are false, mean, and you know it well. You threaten to tarnish my name; Know, then, that strong in the sense of my own purity, I defy both your power and you."

There was a deep silence. Mademoiselle Dantin changed colour, and from pale turned yellow; then bit her lips, and said in a quivering voice:

"Mademoiselle, after this insolent speech, I need not observe that you must cease to belong to my establishment. In a month you leave."

Nathalie haughtily bent her head in token of assent, turned away, and opening the glass door stepped out into the garden followed by the angry and lowering glance of the schoolmistress.



## CHAPTER II.

THE evening, though chill, was clear. The moon had risen in the east, and her calm light fell over the narrow garden. A wide beech-tree spread its sombre yet graceful masses in the shade, whilst its silvery trunk and foremost boughs received the slanting and tremulous rays of the moon. Beyond rose a group of slender poplars, distinct and dark on the cloudless sky, and casting their long line of waving shadow on the green sward, now of a pale grey hue, in the cool moon-light.

Nathalie was bare-headed and lightly clad, but she did not heed the cool and penetrating breeze which fanned her fevered brow. She had entered the garden because it was the nearest place to which she could escape from Mademoiselle Dantin's presence; she now remained in it, regardless of the faint mist which rose from every group of trees or mass of shrub, and of the falling dew which made the grass damp beneath her feet. She walked along, not knowing whither she went, her cheek still burning; her warm blood still flowing in a more free and rapid tide, her whole being roused and excited by the spirit of indignant defiance. Her mind was crowded with tumultuous thoughts and feelings. The sense of freedom won and triumph achieved predominated. She went on in a sort of dream, unconscious of anything around her, exulting recklessly over her dearly bought independence. She paused on reaching the garden wall, and this simple physical barrier subdued at once her haughty mood. She turned back, and slowly retraced her steps, with a grave and altered mien. A

wooden bench stood in the deep shadow of the beech-tree, she lingered for awhile near it, motionless and pensive, and at length sat down, looking before her in the same abstracted mood.

The garden of Mademoiselle Dantin was a mere grassy slope, extending at the back of the low and white-walled school-house. The parlour which Nathalie had left, looked almost dark, and a solitary light burned upstairs in the sleeping room of the pupils, for a few still remained in vacation time. She abstractedly watched their shadows moving to and fro across the curtains, until the light was suddenly extinguished, and the whole building relapsed into gloom. Beyond the school, at some distance from it and on a commanding eminence, stood the château of Sainville, a grey, turretted, lordly-looking mansion, embosomed in stately repose, amidst a dark mass of firs and evergreens, over which the moon now hung mild and pale in the deep blue sky of evening.

The château was, however, by no means a large edifice. Although flanked by stone turrets capped with the conical slate roofs so frequently met with in Normandy, it had evidently never been intended as a place of feudal strength. The light and graceful porch, the ornamented façade, belonged to the style of the *Renaissance*, and showed it to be what it really was,—an elegant and luxurious abode, no more. But if the edifice did not lead back the beholder's mind to those far times when stern barons remained aloof in their fortress holds, it possessed a charm and stateliness of its own. The days of the gay and chivalrous Francis the First returned with the light and sculptured balconies, with the paved court and marble

vases, with the broad lawn, the garden terraces, and the sweeping avenues of the surrounding grounds. It was such a dwelling as the royal lover might, in a fond mood, have bestowed on Diana of Poitiers; a place well suited to the courtly revels of a period celebrated for its wealth, magnificence, and voluptuous art. It had indeed been erected under the reign of that gay prince by a Sire de Sainville, whose scutcheon, with the motto, *ung seul desir*, was conspicuously displayed over the whole building. This "only desire" was said by some to have been the possession of a certain beautiful damsel; others asserted that it alluded to the remarkable firmness or obstinacy hereditary in the blood of the Sainvilles. Of this peculiarity the last descendant of that ancient race, who was also the actual owner of the château, had, according to general report, given abundant proof. Left alone in extreme youth with a broken patrimony, and a name tarnished by the profligacy and extravagance of his father, he had gone to foreign lands, engaged in successful speculations, and, after many years of arduous toil, lately returned in the possession of considerable wealth, with which he had satisfied the creditors of his father, effaced the stain of bankruptcy from his scutcheon, and repurchased his paternal mansion and estates. Little was known of his character, save the pertinacity of purpose indicated by this trait. Nathalie had heard him described as a grave and severe man, of cold and haughty manners. Such he had seemed to her when she had seen him at a distance. She now gazed on the small, though handsome château as it rose before her in the moonlight, with a feeling akin to bitterness. A son

of that house, conscious of superior rank and wealth, had thought fit to press on her attentions which he would never have presumed to offer to a woman of a higher station. The consequence to her of this caprice was to cast her unfriended and alone on a world of which she knew nothing, save that it was harsh and severe to the poor.

Passing her hand across her brow, Nathalie endeavoured to banish the gloomy thoughts her position suggested. But she could not do so. The mood which had urged her to defy Mademoiselle Dantin, which had made her rejoice in her liberty, was over. She was free, true; but she felt she had exchanged the imperious rule of one mistress for that of another more tyrannical still, Poverty. There had been a time when the meaning of this word was to her like a dream — poverty in the warm south is divested of half its horrors — but she understood it now. This had been a hard lesson to learn for one whose natural temper was as genial and sunny as her own Provence. Brought up by an old relative in almost unrestrained liberty, she had suddenly found herself cast, by the death of that relative, on her own resources. A half sister, residing in Sainville, had procured her the situation of teacher in Mademoiselle Dantin's school. The change from the south to the north, from freedom to dependence and routine, from affection to freezing indifference, had thrown a chill on the young girl's temper, from which it had never recovered. The shade of doubt had fallen on her hopeful faith; the time was gone when she could feel in herself the native buoyancy that subdues apprehension and fear. The more genial the temper, the more it will dread and feel loneliness,

and Nathalie was alone; she had no relatives, save her half-sister, a dependant like herself; no friends, and no money. There were no other schools in the little town of Sainville, one of the most insignificant places in all Normandy; no families she could enter as governess; no pupils she could teach, save those who came to Mademoiselle Dantin's. Her future looked so blank and so dreary that her heart involuntarily sank within her. "What on earth shall I do?" she asked herself, with an inward shudder. One moment she thought of making her submission to the schoolmistress, but her whole pride rose against it. Any fate seemed preferable to that humiliation.

A low, grating sound near her aroused Nathalie from these reflections. She started to her feet, and turned round hurriedly, with a vague consciousness of the nature of that sound, and of the spot whence it proceeded. No building intervened between the château of Sainville and the school; a wall separated the wide grounds of the one from the narrow garden of the other; the little tenement now occupied by Mademoiselle Dantin had formerly belonged to the gardener of the late Monsieur de Sainville, and the strip of land attached to it had been the kitchen garden of the great house. A door of communication still existed between the two gardens; it stood within a few steps of the beech-tree, and, though she knew that it was always carefully locked on Mademoiselle Dantin's side Nathalie now felt certain that from it proceeded the sounds she had heard.

She turned round—it was so: the door was opening slowly and cautiously; a stranger, in whom she had no difficulty to recognize Charles Marceau, stepped in,

and, leaving the door ajar, turned quietly towards her, apparently neither abashed nor discomposed at the audacity of his intrusion. Nathalie looked at him silently, petrified with amazement. He returned her look, and like her did not speak, as if willing to give her time to recover. Although she had frequently met him, Nathalie had never yet beheld her admirer so nearly; and notwithstanding her anger, surprise, and irritation, she could not help scanning him with a rapid and scrutinizing glance.

Charles Marceau was scarcely above the middle height, with a slight but well-knit frame. He looked upwards of twenty-five; he was in reality some years younger, but his features, though remarkably handsome, were thin, sallow, and careworn. Nathalie was struck with their sharp decisive outlines, as he stood before her on the moonlit sward, his glance fixed upon her, and his pale countenance, half turned towards her, rendered more pale by the dark mass of hair which fell around it. The look which she gave him lasted but a moment; the next she turned away, and was stepping into the path that led to the school, when, by a sudden and dexterous movement, the young man anticipated her, and, though scarcely appearing to do so intentionally, effectually impeded her passage by standing before her.

"I hope," said he, in a respectful tone, and in a low, though singularly harmonious voice, "that I have not alarmed you."

Nathalie had turned to give him a quick, fearless look; the silent curl of her lip spoke of a feeling very different from fear.

"I see you are deeply offended," he resumed, eyeing her attentively; "be so good —"

"Be so good as to let me pass," sharply said Nathalie.

"But one word, and I depart," he humbly continued. "Did you receive my letter?"

"Ay, Sir, from the hands of Mademoiselle Dantin."

A slight raising of the eyebrow, a brief projection of the nether lip, and the word "Indeed!" coolly uttered, were the only marks of surprise or annoyance the young man manifested.

"Then I suppose the girl has betrayed me, after all," he composedly observed, casting an inquiring glance towards Nathalie.

Her colour rose; she looked as if she would give him an annihilating reply; then drew back, turning her head away as if in scorn of speech. She would have moved on; once more he stepped before her and spoke, but now with downcast look and beseeching tone.

"Do not — pray do not turn away so indignantly. Allow me but one word more. Did that letter offend you?"

"No questions, Sir," said Nathalie, angrily; "leave me, ere I summon assistance."

Her tone was indignant, though subdued. The young man met her irritated glance as she stood close by him in the clear moonlight, pausing ere she once more endeavoured to pass by; he marked the angry flush which crimsoned her cheek and brow, and his own countenance expressed more vexation and surprise than alarm at the threat she had issued.

"Nay, heaven forbid you should be placed under

any such necessity," he somewhat sharply replied; "could I have formed some other method of meeting you, I would never have adopted this. But remember, you seldom go out; you are always accompanied; I may look, but never speak; if I write, my letters are seized. Was I then to trust to chance, or presumptuously hope that, meeting me so often, you would at length guess why I ever lingered around your path?"

He had begun almost haughtily, but his voice had a low and harmonious cadence as he concluded.

"Will you let me pass, or not?" imperatively asked Nathalie.

He bit his lip, but bowed and stepped back a few paces in silent humility. Nathalie very unceremoniously passed by him; he followed, observing, in a low apologetic tone:

"Believe me, but for the tyranny of Mademoiselle Dantin, I should never —"

"Go on, Sir, go on," exclaimed a shrill and exasperated voice behind him; "it is charming to hear you. I am delighted, Mademoiselle Montolieu, to find you so pleasantly engaged.

Charles Marceau turned round hastily. Mademoiselle Dantin, who had approached, unheard and unseen, was standing close by him. For a moment, the young man looked disturbed. Nathalie, though she knew well the consequences of this new misfortune, stood ready to meet them, resolute, though motionless and pale. The schoolmistress, her tall and thin frame drawn up to its full height, her arms folded across her breast, eyed them both with a moody glance, slowly nodding her head with vindictive triumph.

"Well," said she, sharply, "why don't you go on?"



why don't you continue your interesting conversation? I hope I don't prevent you."

She did not seem very likely to prevent Charles Marceau, for, turning once more towards Nathalie, he coolly resumed from where he had left off.

"I should never have presumed to act as I have acted. This imprudence has injured me — justly, perhaps — in your good opinion; yet may I hope that you will forgive me."

He looked up into her face, as if anxiously waiting for her reply. Mademoiselle Dantin, astounded at his coolness, and at the impertinent disregard with which he seemed to treat her presence, glared at him in speechless wrath. When she spoke at length, the whole torrent of her indignation was poured forth on Nathalie.

"I am delighted," said she, with a short exasperated laugh, "pleased beyond measure, to perceive that Mademoiselle Montolieu, that pattern of propriety, that model of virtuous indignation, entertains no great objection to a quiet evening rendezvous. By moonlight, too; — how sentimental! They are fond of the moonlight in the south; here we think it cool."

Nathalie gave her a kindling look, but did not answer.

"Pray forgive me; I feel it was wrong, very wrong, indeed, to penetrate here, without your permission," said Charles Marceau, addressing Nathalie, but half glancing towards the schoolmistress.

"I hope," exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin, in a shrill tone, "I sincerely hope Mademoiselle Montolieu will attempt no useless or absurd justification. Mademoiselle Montolieu knows I am not to be duped. She

knows the garden door was not only locked, but bolted on this side of the wall, and that by some individual on this side of the wall," she added, raising her voice, "the bolt must therefore have been withdrawn. I consider this as clear a proposition as any in the 'Grammaire Logique,' or any legal case I ever heard of."

"Madame," said Charles Marceau, turning towards her with something like hauteur, "I pledge you my word that Mademoiselle Montolieu is free from all blame; — that I alone am guilty."

The schoolmistress shut her eyes, and turned up her nose, with a short, disdainful sniff; but she deigned him neither reply nor answering look. He resumed:

"I hope, therefore, that the innocence of Mademoiselle Montolieu —"

"Spare yourself the task of its justification, Sir," coldly interrupted Nathalie. "I need none, if Mademoiselle Dantin has overheard all."

"I did," triumphantly answered the schoolmistress, nodding her head, as she spoke, "I heard every word. I hear everything in this establishment, Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"Then surely you know I am not to blame," observed Nathalie, with some impatience.

"Oh, no! Of course not at all!" said Mademoiselle Dantin, gently inclining her head, and eyeing Nathalie, through her half-shut eyes.

"Do you mean to hint that this gentleman is here with my connivance?" exclaimed Nathalie, with that impetuosity which always gave so much advantage to her opponent.

"Oh, no!" replied Mademoiselle Dantin, "by no means. You admit him! Impossible! It was I let him in, certainly."

Indignation and contempt struggled for mastery in Nathalie's expressive countenance. Her head drooped; she raised her hand to her forehead. When she spoke, her tone was altered and low.

"May heaven forgive you; you are more unjust, — ay, and far more cruel, than I thought you."

This speech did not tend to pacify the school-mistress, who, to do her justice, thought the young girl guilty; perhaps because she wished to think her so; and though she had witnessed the meeting at a distance, had only overheard the observation in which Charles Marceau so unluckily introduced her name. She now loftily observed:

You need not give yourself such airs of injured innocence; a pure-minded woman, who regarded either her health or her reputation, would never have stayed out in the open air until this hour."

"I think, Madame," interposed Charles Marceau, "that I already explained —"

"Be so kind as to understand that the month's notice I gave you this evening is rescinded," continued Mademoiselle Dantin, totally disregarding the young man's attempted explanation. "After your disgraceful conduct, you cannot remain another night under the shelter of this uncontaminated roof."

"Madame," impatiently observed Charles Marceau, "have I not pledged you my word of honour that I alone am to blame — that this lady is wholly innocent?"

He spoke politely still, but with the authoritative

surprise of a superior addressing a person of inferior rank. The schoolmistress eyed him from head to foot, then raised her look again until it met his.

"Sir," said she, at length, "I forgive your presumption, on account of your extreme youth; but you will please to remember I am mistress of these premises. Be so kind as to quit them, instantly."

Without heeding her, the young man turned towards Nathalie.

"Mademoiselle," said he, in a submissive tone, which contrasted with the superciliousness he had displayed towards the schoolmistress, "words could not express the penitent sorrow I feel."

"I dare say not," cried Mademoiselle Dantin, with a short, hysterical laugh.

"Will my presence here be of the least use to you?" he earnestly continued. "Say but a word; and though this should expose me to the most bitter mortifications, I shall remain."

"Remain!" echoed the schoolmistress, with shrill indignation. "Monsieur will remain to protect mademoiselle! Well, I should like to see that. Remain!"

Not heeding her words more than the breeze which swept by him, Charles Marceau kept his eyes fixed on Nathalie, silently awaiting her reply. The young girl shrugged her shoulders, and tapped her little foot with evident impatience.

"You may go, Sir," she said, in her hasty way. "Your presence, though quite able to produce mischief, is powerless for good."

"Oh! he may go, may he?" sharply ejaculated Mademoiselle Dantin. "How fortunate mademoiselle permits her knight to depart! There is no knowing,

however, that I, though neither young nor pretty, might not have found means to effect the same marvel."

The young man heeded her not; he was looking at Nathalie, and his gaze had something of offended pride, anger, sadness, and reproach. But his glance fell at length; he bowed in silent submission, and folding his arms across his breast, slowly turned down the path.

The sound of the door, which closed behind him, revealed that he had left the place. Not satisfied with this evidence, Mademoiselle Dantin threw a keen look around her. On perceiving that he was really gone, she went and bolted the door carefully, then returned to the spot where Nathalie was still standing.

### CHAPTER III.

THE young girl did not change her attitude; she stood on the sward, erect and calm. The beech-tree threw its dark shadow behind her, but the clear moonlight fell on her face. She looked pale, though sedate; one hand supported her cheek, the other was rather nervously stripping a neighbouring shrub of its leaves. Her heart, perchance, beat fast within her as she saw ruin and disgrace so near, but her brow was as fearless as her look was steady; her lips were firmly compressed as if she had resolved not to speak inconsiderately, though by no means to remain silent. She looked not unlike the mariner who sees the shore on which he must be wrecked ere long, but who beholds it with unquailing eye and heart unappalled by danger. As her glance met that of the schoolmistress

its resolute meaning roused all her ire; she eyed her for awhile with sour sternness.

"You have heard me," she said at length.

"What have I heard?"

"That you must leave to-night."

"Why so?"

Different as their voices were, they both spoke in the same interjectional and rapid tone, exchanging looks that boded not peace.

"Why so?" again asked Nathalie, and she drew herself up haughtily, as if to repel with all her might the expected accusation and insult.

"Because," the schoolmistress steadily replied, "we are a calm phlegmatic race, and decidedly object to moonlight walks and meetings; because this is Normandy, not Provence, where such things are, I suppose, a matter of course."

Whenever Mademoiselle Dantin wished to rouse the young girl, she taunted her with her mother's birth. The brow of Nathalie flushed directly.

"You are right, Madame," she quickly answered; "no, we are not in Provence; for there men have chivalrous honour, and women warm, generous hearts, unknown to this land of lawyers, lawsuits, and narrow feeling."

"Oh! you may give me your killing looks," said Mademoiselle Dantin, shaking her head, "I am not afraid, though I have heard that your Provençal and Basque girls regularly wear a stiletto, instead of a busk to their stays, like those shocking Spanish women."

"Madame," replied Nathalie, shrugging her shoulders, after the French fashion, with disdainful impatience, "we are wandering from the point."

"The point," sharply said the schoolmistress, "is that you must leave this very night."

"I again ask why," inquired Nathalie, eyeing her steadily.

"Because your behaviour has been improper, unwomanly, immodest."

Nathalie's lips quivered, her colour rose and died away, until it settled in a bright burning spot on either cheek. Shame, indignant anger, proud resentment of wrong were in her bearing and her look. Dignity vainly whispered to turn away with silent scorn; Nathalie was too unsophisticated to yield to its promptings; if ever she was or seemed dignified, it was because her mood led her to be so; but now she recked not of effect; insult had stung and roused her, as only insult can sting and rouse; passion was strong and would speak.

"I am not unwomanly or immodest," she passionately cried, her dark eyes flashing through tears, her voice broken by ill-repressed sobs; "I am not, but you are a very bad and cruel woman. To dismiss me is nothing, but to ruin my reputation and fair name is abominable. I did not let that young man in; I did not know he was coming; you must, you do know that."

The most evil are not all pitiless, and Mademoiselle Dantin, who was not a cruel, but an inflexible formalist, perhaps began to suspect that she had wrongly accused the young girl; perhaps her threat of instant dismissal had only been held out to give rise to an appeal for mercy; it may even be that some vague feeling of compassion induced her to relent. Whatever was the reason, she at least now said something about

permitting her to spend the night in the house; she even hinted that, provided a proper submission were made to her offended majesty, she might be induced not to speak of the meeting she had detected. But Nathalie was in no placable mood; she resented this seeming concession as another implied insult, but to be repelled with haughty disdain.

"Never!" she exclaimed, with true southern energy; "submit when I am innocent, — when I have done no wrong. Never! As for spending the night in this house, after the words you have uttered, I will not. In my country," she added, emphatically, "we are either at peace or at enmity. Now I tell you that I am not at peace with you, that I will not sleep beneath your roof."

"She is positively getting blue with anger," cried Mademoiselle Dantin, with a bewildered look.

"I have borne with ill-temper," continued Nathalie, "with petty annoyances, not patiently — I am not patient — but without more than passing anger. I considered that your years —"

"My years!"

"Your early disappointments had naturally soured your temper."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, if by early disappointments you allude to my not being married —"

"I allude to nothing, but I say that when you attack my honour I will resent it with all my might; that when you turn against me the stiletto, called slander, I will not be your guest, eat your bread, touch your salt, or sleep beneath your roof. I shall spend this night at the inn, and be on my road to Paris or



Provence to-morrow. Say of me all you can say; I do not, I will not fear you."

She abruptly turned away, and when Mademoiselle Dantin recovered from the stupor into which this daring speech had thrown her, Nathalie had almost reached the end of the garden.

"Good heavens! what a tongue!" exclaimed the schoolmistress, drawing in a long breath.

She slowly returned to the house which she re-entered by a side door, whilst Nathalie stopped for a while near the glass door of the parlour. The reaction of passion had come — she was weeping; but the weakness was brief; she shook her tears away, smiled to herself and entered the "salon," as it was called, where a solitary light still burned on the table. She was passing rapidly through the room, when an anxious voice exclaimed:

"Mademoiselle Nathalie, what mean those pearly drops?"

Nathalie turned quickly round and stopped on beholding the little Chevalier, whom she had not perceived. He briskly stepped forward and eyed with evident emotion her flushed face, on which indignant tears still glistened.

"I have been insulted, Chevalier," she said in her rapid way.

"Insulted by whom?" he asked, with a frown.

"By a certain neighbour of ours, who imagined, no doubt, I had been pleased with impertinent attentions, and by a certain lady of this house who chose to share this belief."

The Chevalier looked grave. He might in a lady's

defence call out a gentleman, but he could not exactly call out another lady.

"This must be a mistake," he at length observed; "mistakes will occur even between amiable ladies, especially when there is southern vivacity on one side and northern prudence on the other. There must be an *éclaircissement*."

Nathalie shook her head.

"Chevalier," she said, calmly enough, for her anger was as brief as it was vehement; "I grant that Mademoiselle Dantin is mistaken; that if she has tormented me, I have provoked her; but no *éclaircissement* could now make me stay here. We agree like fire and water, with this difference that she cannot quench me. Faulty I may be, but she is not the one by whom I can be changed. She will do me justice in this matter later; I hope and think so; if not, let it be; my own conscience acquits me; I care little for verdict. I am going this very night — adieu."

The little dancing-master drew back with a step expressive of dismay.

"Mademoiselle!" he exclaimed; "going! No, allow me; my feelings will not admit it — it cannot be."

He seemed filled with so much consternation that Nathalie could not repress a smile. He appeared to hesitate: but at length decisively observed: — "Will Mademoiselle Montolieu allow me a question: that — that gentleman —?"

His look finished the sentence. She coloured a little and said: —

"Well, Chevalier, what about that gentleman?"

The little dancing-master coughed: it was so delicate a subject, and he had such a deep, almost pain-

ful respect for female delicacy, of which Mademoiselle Dantin had contributed to give him the most refined idea.

"Did he venture on language, too — too — ardent?" he observed with a frown.

"Oh! no," quietly replied Nathalie, "it was much worse."

"Much worse!" echoed the Chevalier, and visions of a kiss stolen from the fair hand of the Provençal girl, rendered the modest little man mute and abashed with indignation.

"Yes, much worse," decisively replied Nathalie; "what do I care about the courtesy or reserve of manner, when the actions are bold and insulting? He has followed me, written to me, and finally contrived a meeting in the garden, all without any encouragement save what he derived from his own presumption."

She looked indignant as she spoke.

The Chevalier was no doubt devoted to the ladies, but still he was a man, and could in matters of the heart, feel for his own sex; he could, as he expressed it with a sigh, "sympathize with the follies and delirium of youthful passion;" and, provided that profound respect due to every woman were not infringed, he could tolerate almost any extravagance of conduct. It was, he contended, one of the rights and privileges of the fair sex, to make men act extravagantly; and the greater the folly the deeper the love. He now charitably endeavoured to convince Nathalie of this truth. No doubt her admirer had been much to blame, but it was all the fault of his bewildering passion; he had endeavoured to make that passion known by looks, writing and speech. "And as for his getting in by

the door," feelingly added the dancing-master, "is it not much better than scrambling over the wall, as so many, unable to control their feelings, would have done in his place? a proceeding certainly more offensive to a lady's delicacy than that which he adopted."

Nathalie heard him with a patient smile. She liked the gentle Chevalier with his old-fashioned courtesy of bygone times, with his reverence for love, passion and women. Mademoiselle Dantin invariably drew forth the least amiable points in her character, but the Chevalier had the power to soften her down to girlish gentleness and grace. She quietly clasped her hands upon his arm, and looking down into his face, said softly: —

"You do not think me prudish, do you?"

"No, no," he warmly replied; "it is the beautiful, the sensitive delicacy of woman."

"No, it is not that," said the young girl, smiling and drawing up her slender figure, "it is pride;" and there was pride in her dark eye, curling lip, and erect bearing.

"But surely not a pride that forbids you to pity the unhappy passions you have inspired?" urged the tender-hearted Chevalier.

"What passion? He has seen me a few times, never so much as spoken to me before to-night; what passion can he feel?"

The Chevalier, too delicate to speak more openly, shook his head and sighed in the direction of the looking-glass over the mantel-shelf. Nathalie looked at first unconscious of his meaning, but as she saw her own image reflected back in the shadowy depths

of the mirror, she blushed, and smiled at the compliment.

"Well, I suppose he finds me pretty," she said, resolutely conquering a little hesitation at speaking so frankly; "but how can I esteem the man who likes me for my face, without so much as knowing my heart, mind, or temper? You would not act or feel thus."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," seriously replied the Chevalier, laying his hand upon his heart, and looking down as he spoke, "must appeal to some less sensitive judge. I cannot, alas! but confess the power of beauty. I may also venture to hint to her that there are mysteries as yet unrevealed to her heart; that love conveys, in the slightest glimpse, an accurate knowledge of the beloved object; and that a particular friend of mine once received from the sight of a foot an impression never to be erased."

"A foot!" exclaimed Nathalie, laughing merrily, "why how can this be?"

But the Chevalier remained quite grave, and assured her that in a man of delicate feelings and sensitive heart such a passion was perfectly natural. As to the particular process by which the first impression ripened into love, he bashfully declared that speech was powerless to describe it, and, as Nathalie laughingly insisted, he quietly begged to change the subject. The young girl perceiving that his modesty was getting alarmed, immediately became serious; he resumed their previous conversation by saying:

"Let me also observe, in favour of the unhappy young man — I call every man unhappy who suffers from a lady's displeasure — that his uncle, Monsieur

de Sainville, is generally considered a man of singular coldness and pride; a man whose haughty will —”

Nathalie interrupted him, and said briefly:

“The man, Sir, who dares not confess such feelings openly, is not worthy of having them returned. This Monsieur Marceau sought, for his own sake, a concealment which has seriously injured me. He dared not have acted so with a great lady; but I was poor and obscure — therefore he ventured. There might have been something like courage in his conduct had I the stern father, uncle, or guardian, of a heroine of romance to brave; but I had not, and therefore is his action paltry. I am alone, undefended, and he showed me that he knew it.”

“No, not alone, not undefended, whilst Theodore de Méranville-Louville has the breath of life and the heart and arm of a man,” fervently exclaimed the gallant little dancing-master, half kneeling at her feet in a transport of a chivalrous ardour.

In her surprise Nathalie stepped back. She knew not the powerful impression her words had produced on the gentle and generous nature of the Chevalier. He beheld her, a young and lovely girl, in need of protection, and saw nothing better than to offer himself with prompt zeal for the defence of her person and honour. It was not the little man's fault if he came in this world ages after chivalry had gone out of fashion; still less his fault, if nature and fortune, whilst giving him the soul and illusive name, had denied him the shape and profession of knight. Nathalie promptly understood him; she was both amused and touched, and smiled down on the dancing-master through gathering tears.

"Rise, Sir Chevalier," she said, holding out her hand to him, and entering with southern mirth and vivacity into the spirit of the tone he assumed; "if ever I need defender or knight, I will have none save you."

Enraptured at this promise, the Chevalier kissed the tips of her fingers, and rose with the triumphant mien of a knight received into the favour of a fair lady, whilst with a smile that gradually became more arch, she continued:

"But I need not remind a man of your worldly tact, that the time is gone when ladies sought or accepted the vindication of their honour from the strong arm of man."

"And why should it be gone?" he somewhat jealously exclaimed; "why should not the strong arm of man, as you so justly observe, be stretched forth to protect innocence and beauty?"

"Because the world is a slanderous world," replied Nathalie with a serious face, but mirth and mischief in her eyes; "because it would be sure to say that nothing save the most violent passion could impel the Chevalier to take, so energetically, the defence of Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"Well, then," he exclaimed, with much *entrainement*, "since you have perceived my folly, I confess it; yes, I am your slave." He spoke in a very excited tone, and stood with folded arms before her.

At first Nathalie remained stunned.

"Is the poor little man actually in love with me?" she thought, with dismay; but her fears vanished, when she remembered how eloquently he had pleaded the cause of Charles Marceau. The truth was, that

the too sensitive Chevalier was in love with every woman he knew, from Mademoiselle Dantin down to Marianne, and consequently with Nathalie, as well as the rest; her unprotected and painful position — his half-accepted offer of becoming her knight had fired his brain, and, for the moment, he certainly felt a most violent passion, which he was not far from thinking returned. At the same time, he was somewhat dismayed at the boldness of his avowal. Nathalie was too much amused to look angry, and too kind-hearted to laugh; she feigned deafness, and said, quietly:

"I need not tell you how injurious to a lady's reputation any such *éclat* would be; therefore, my good knight, I, your liege lady, lay on you my sovereign commands not to hurt or molest, in any manner whatsoever, the individual named Charles Marceau."

"May I not speak to his uncle?" asked the Chevalier, a little crest-fallen, for he was not quite the dupe of Nathalie's deafness.

"By no means; the uncle has the name of a most disagreeable haughty man — I care no more for him, than I do for his nephew."

"But, Mademoiselle, something must be done, — what will you do?"

"Leave this house to-night," was the calm reply.

"That only makes the matter worse; — I must speak to Mademoiselle Dantin."

"And what can you say to her that she does not know? If, finding me alone in the garden with a young man, she chooses to believe I brought him there, who shall prevent her?"

"I certainly cannot prevent her," replied the



dancing-master, with something like dignity, "but there is such a thing as protesting against an injustice. If Mademoiselle Dantin will be unjust to a young and unprotected lady, I shall and must break with her."

He spoke very decisively. Nathalie looked at him with some emotion.

"Monsieur le Chevalier," said she, gently, "you were ill last year." The Chevalier looked very rueful. "You have not many friends in Sainville," she continued, "and then I believe you had but one."

"Yes," he replied thoughtfully, rubbing his aquiline nose, "heaven forbid I should ever forget or deny a lady's favours. Mademoiselle Dantin certainly showed herself a kind lady; the medicines she sent me were rather bitter, but wonderfully fine, I have no doubt: she also sent me some very excellent confitures and jellies when I was getting better — these were sweet."

"My friend," kindly said Nathalie, "you must not break with a woman who has done this, who would do it again, and who, if she has a gentle feeling in her breast, has it for you. Besides, it would be useless — nothing shall make me stay here; I have been insulted — I must go: be quite easy about me, God is good to all, and kind to the young."

The little Chevalier slapped his forehead disractedly, and paced the room with hasty steps and agitated air. He felt grateful for both medicines and jellies; and the "gentle feeling" of which Nathalie spoke, moved him strangely. He could not, with any delicacy, inquire into the exact nature of Mademoiselle Dantin's weakness, and, indeed, felt rather alarmed at the prospect of ascertaining how far it had gone.

But touched and grateful as he felt, it was impossible to forget that he was the sworn knight of another lady now in sore distress. For a moment his fertile and excited imagination represented him as standing between two fair dames, — one certainly lovely, and the other intellectual — is not intellect beauty? — and not knowing on which side to turn. But at length he took a truer and calmer view of the subject, smoothed his wig, composed himself, and magnanimously resolved to abide where gratitude cast her chains around him.

Nathalie smiled when he announced his resolve with a rueful sigh; she bade him a cheerful adieu, and gaily assured him he was none the less her knight. The dancing-master took her hands within his own — an unwonted freedom — and looked at her silently.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he said at length, in a moved tone, "you are young, pretty, and very charming, but you have something far better than all that — a good, kind heart. Happy the man who is to have you, and may God bless him and you!"

Tears stood in his eyes, and in Nathalie's too, as they parted. She went up to her room with a light, cheerful heart. Nothing had occurred to change her position; but her temper had led her to yield to every impression of the moment, and her present impressions were light and pleasant. Resting her curved chin in the palm of her hand, she paced the room up and down in meditative mood. A smile was on her lips, and the look of her dark eyes was bright and hopeful.

"I am glad I am going," she thought, "truly glad.

This perverse woman would positively end by making me enjoy a quarrel. I have enjoyed it — I know I have," she added, a little ruefully; "but I dare say all this is for the best: I could scarcely have left her otherwise, but now I must go, of course; and where shall I go, I wonder?"

She stopped short, and looked grave and disturbed. She was a stranger in Sainville; her only friend was her sister, and she was now at Rouen, with the old aunt under whose protection she resided. The town inn seemed the only place open to the young girl. It was a quiet, decent house, where few travellers ever came, yet the thought of going there was extremely disagreeable to Nathalie; she now regretted not having agreed to spend the night in the school. But this was a trifling consideration in comparison to another which offered itself to her attention under the following startling form: "Mademoiselle Dantin will say I contrived a meeting with that young man in the garden. I did not: but will the world believe her or me?" She endeavoured to chase the thought away, but it would return, and with it the growing conviction that her own version of the story would not be that most favourably received. Disgrace, whether it be merited or not, is hard to bear, in youth especially. Nathalie was one of those impatient spirits who resent injustice in word and feeling. She had never submitted to Mademoiselle Dantin's tyranny; she now felt indignant and amazed that a chain of circumstances over which she seemingly had no power, should have produced results so galling to her pride and so fatal to her welfare. She was young and handsome, therefore she was to be suspected; poor,

therefore unfriended and alone; innocent, but not the less disgraced.

"It this possible?" she asked of herself with incredulous surprise. She thought of Charles, but with increased bitterness and indignation, and as the cause of all her woe. Why had he persecuted her with attentions so fatal, which had tarnished her name, and cast on it a stain she would find it so hard to efface? She found an insult not only in the boldness of his actions, but also in the coolness and composure which characterized them. She recalled with irritation every particular of this interview. "He is not handsome," she ejaculated inwardly; "I looked at him well, and it was not so dark but what I could see: I like neither his face nor his look; one is too old in feeling, and the other too keen and watchful in expression. His whole conduct was heartless and cruel; he shall find himself mistaken if he imagines it has placed me in his power!"

The mere idea roused her; she also remembered that it was time to act — not merely to think of her departure, but to prepare for it. Ere long her drawers were emptied, and their contents transferred to her trunk. She was cording it up, when a low, timid knock was heard at the door. Nathalie knew it was Marianne, the servant. She bade her enter, and, merely glancing round, resumed her task.

The girl obeyed, closed the door with nervous haste, then remained standing near it without speaking. She had a good-natured face, fresh and full; but her eyes, of a pale blue, had a startled and bewildered look, as if she were in a state of constant alarm.

"Well, Marianne, what is it?" asked Nathalie, in

her quick, cheerful way, rising as she spoke to face the girl.

But Marianne, on perceiving the corded trunk, uttered a faint scream. Nathalie gave her a look of surprise.

"Oh, Mademoiselle!" exclaimed Marianne, still short of breath, "I have done it! — You are going! — I have done it!"

"You, Marianne!" quickly said Nathalie, looking very vexed. "Do you mean to say you let that young man in?"

Marianne hung down her head and wrung her hands.

"Answer me," imperatively said Nathalie; "did you do it or not?"

"I thought there was no harm," said Marianne, feebly.

"No harm!"

"I mean that you would not be angry."

This did not mend the matter

"And pray what made you think so?" drily asked Nathalie.

"I thought — I am sure I do not know — but he was so handsome."

"He is not," was the sharp reply; "but he is very insolent, Marianne."

"Oh, is he?" said Marianne, looking rather bewildered. "I am very sorry, but I thought that, being so rich and handsome — as I imagined," she added, correcting herself, "and so fond of you too" — Nathalie's lip curled disdainfully — "I fancied — I know I would not to have done it; but Mademoiselle Dantin

always says I am so wicked, and I suppose I am," she added, disconsolately.

Nathalie's resentment was as readily appeased as it was easy to awaken. She knew Marianne was a poor weak and nervous creature, whose little original spirit had long been broken by the redoubtable Mademoiselle Dantin. She believed, moreover, that she was attached to her, and had probably thought to serve her by her indiscreet conduct. She now sought to console her by assuring her of her forgiveness; but on hearing this, Marianne began to sob and moan very drearily, calling all the saints of heaven to witness she had meant no harm.

"Very well," rather abruptly said Nathalie, who was more kind-hearted than patient; "come Marianne, here is the *fichu* I have cut out for you; you have nothing to do but to hem it."

But as this recalled to Marianne the many similar kindnesses she had received from the young girl, it only added to her grief. Nathalie perceiving that she was getting hysterical, made her sit down, and laying her hand on the girl's shoulder, kindly looked into her face, whilst she said with some gravity:

"You have cried enough, and tears are of no earthly use. You did wrong, meaning well; a common mistake. I have forgiven you, let us hear no more about it; indeed, the sooner you leave this room the better. On reflection, I think it is quite useless your mistress should know what has passed. She would not exonerate me, but say we were accomplices; only Marianne, if another teacher should come in my place, do not let young men get into the garden. And now, what was it you came up here to tell me?"

"Holy Virgin!" cried Marianne, much startled, "I quite forget it! The sight of that trunk —"

"What was it?"

"A message from Mademoiselle Dantin."

"She might have spared herself that trouble," quickly exclaimed Nathalie, colouring very much, as she spoke; "I have no wish to stay, I am quite ready to go; Marianne, you may tell her so," she added, putting on her shawl and tying her bonnet-strings.

"*Oh! mon Dieu*, Mademoiselle," said Marianne, "it was not that at all, — but you are so quick! just like a milksoup, — up directly."

"Well, what was it then?"

"Why I believe it is a strange lady below who wishes to speak to you."

"A lady!" said Nathalie, looking up with much surprise; "and who is she, Marianne?"

Marianne did not know. The lady's face was turned from her, when she answered her mistress's ring, and it was not she who had let her in. Nathalie felt puzzled to imagine who the stranger might be, for she was acquainted with no one in Sainville; but without losing much time in conjecture or accepting Marianne's offer of knowing from the other servant, she resolved to go down and learn.

She paused for a moment on reaching the door of the parlour; it stood ajar, and a ray of light glided from the opening into the dark corridor. She had thought to hear the stranger's voice, and thus learn who she was, but if the room had been vacant it could not have been more silent. With an indefinite feeling between hope and uneasiness, Nathalie pushed the door open and entered.

Mademoiselle Dantin was seated, as when we first saw her, before the table which had been Nathalie's bar of judgment. She looked discomposed: and an angry spot sat on either of her sallow cheeks, as she fanned herself indignantly with a coarse coloured pocket-handkerchief. At a little distance from her, with her back to the door, stood a lady, who quickly turned round on hearing Nathalie enter.

She was tall, erect, and very richly attired; she looked between forty and fifty; she might have appeared, and she perhaps was, younger, but for the careworn expression of her countenance. Her features were more regular than pleasing; the brow was too low, and the upper lip had a haughty curl, yet the whole face was far from repulsive; many would have pronounced it handsome.

Nathalie looked at her and vaguely felt that she had seen her before, but where or how, she could not remember.

"The young lady, I presume," said the stranger, giving Nathalie a keen look, and addressing Mademoiselle Dantin, in a rich harmonious voice that seemed familiar to the young girl's ear. The school-mistress gave a short disdainful nod, as the lady turned once more towards Nathalie and observed, with an inclination of the head, between pride and courtesy:

"I am come, Mademoiselle Montolieu, to express my great regret for the indiscretion of which my son rendered himself guilty towards you this evening. — I regret it exceedingly," she added, slightly drawing herself up.

Nathalie bowed silently. She now recognized the



speaker as their neighbour Madame Marceau. The lady continued:

"I am really distressed that a son of our house — that my son — should have acted so. I understand too there is a servant in the case; — it is positively shocking."

She raised a richly-chased vinaigrette to her nose, as if to purify the very idea.

"Shocking!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Dantin, irefully: "it is more, Madame, I" — drawing herself up — "I call it abominable! To bribe my servant; — but I shall teach the bold creature her place yet," she added, rising to give the bell-rope a violent pull.

"Not now, Madame, — not now," said Madame Marceau, waving her right hand with a haughty grace, that did not misbecome her, whilst her left maintained the vinaigrette in its position; — "not now, I pray. I have no doubt, from what my son has told me, the girl is guilty; I should certainly dismiss her. At the same time, I am sure your ready tact will suggest to you the impropriety of any such explanation at present. You may go," she added, directing a stately nod towards Marianne, who had appeared at the door with her usual bewildered air; "your mistress does not want you yet. Go, my good girl, — go."

Mademoiselle Dantin was no submissive person, yet somehow or other she now resumed her seat, and allowed Marianne to depart in silence. Madame Marceau bore her down completely. It was not the lady's wealth or station effected this wonder, for the schoolmistress, to do her justice, never stooped save where there was some advantage to be derived, and in the

present case there was none; but though she could not exactly understand why, she now felt entirely thrown into the shade. Madame Marceau's stately person and grand ways, her figure, full yet graceful, — her dress of rich silk and ample folds, — her Indian shawl, negligently draped around her, as if it were a thing of no price, — ay, even her bonnet, with the waving plume that rose and fell with every motion of the wearer's head, failed not in their effect, and hushed the wrath of the schoolmistress. Being, however, a woman of very great spirit, she soon rallied, and was preparing for an outbreak of which the exordium would have been relative to the propriety of some people giving orders to their own servants, and other people not going to be trodden upon, when Madame Marceau, perceiving her intention, interfered.

"By-and-bye, my good Mademoiselle Dantin," said she, with a patronizing smile, "by-and-bye; allow me first to explain the case to this young lady. I am distressed, extremely so indeed," she continued, addressing her discourse to Nathalie; "I positively am, at all that has happened. I have been explaining the whole matter to Mademoiselle Dantin, who now understands her mistake," — the schoolmistress was preparing for an indignant denial, but was not permitted to open her lips, — "by-and-bye, when I have explained everything to Mademoiselle Montolieu. At the same time," resumed Madame Marceau, again addressing Nathalie, "I have no difficulty in understanding that for many reasons, you may object to remain even one day longer beneath her roof. Will you accept of the hospitality which, when I had confided to him what my son had confided to me, my brother

begged of me to offer you? But pray," she added, very graciously, "receive this proposal in the same spirit in which it is made, — as a favour to be conferred upon us. We really shall not be easy unless you afford us this opportunity of repairing my son's deplorable indiscretion." Nathalie made no reply; she evidently hesitated. Madame Marceau gave an anxious look. "I hope," said she, somewhat uneasily, "the offer is not displeasing. I am sure I should be quite grieved — What is it, Madame?"

The latter words came out very sharply, and were addressed to Mademoiselle Dantin, who, on hearing Madame Marceau's altered tone and language, had thought proper to recline back in her chair, close her eyes, and give utterance to a disdainful "Bah!"

"What is it, Madame?" again asked Madame Marceau, drawing up her fine figure, and wrapping herself with extreme majesty.

"Nothing, Madame," shortly replied the school-mistress.

Madame Marceau eyed her very slowly, then turned once more towards Nathalie, evidently waiting for her reply.

The young girl's resolve was already taken. She did not think that between the inn or the château of Sainville there was much cause to hesitate; she could, moreover, detect a great difference in the tone with which Madame Marceau addressed her, from that in which she spoke to Mademoiselle Dantin; the distinction gratified her wounded pride. But composed as she endeavoured to seem, there was a feeling she could not help betraying, and this feeling was surprise. She knew that the step Madame Marceau now

took was the very last any of the *bourgeois* ladies of Sainville would have adopted in similar circumstances. Madame Marceau, who was looking at her very attentively, smiled with a sort of quiet triumph, that seemed to say: "Yes, my dear child, it is so; no little *parvenue* would act thus; but I am a great lady of that old noblesse which has courtesy and chivalry of feeling still. Our titles are nothing; our wealth is gone, but that remains to distinguish us for ever from those of plebeian blood and race."

It was thus at least that Nathalie rapidly interpreted the meaning of the dark and handsome, though haughty face, on which she now gazed; but she subdued her momentary surprise, and replied, with a gravity and composure unusual to her:

"Madame, I sincerely thank you for your offer. I will not say that I accept it, because the circumstances you allude to with so much regret leave me no other choice; my motives are, I trust, of a higher order. The insinuations which Mademoiselle Dantin has thrown out against me would, I confess it, seem to be justified by my abrupt departure from her establishment, where, nevertheless, I have no wish to remain — no, not one hour longer," she added, giving the schoolmistress a reproachful glance; "but if I leave her house for yours," she continued, again addressing Madame Marceau, "her protection for your protection, I believe that my bitterest enemies, if I have indeed any, must needs be silent; these, and these only, are my motives."

She spoke with quiet pride, almost coldly, for she was jealous of not compromising her dignity.

"Whatever they may be," very graciously replied

Madame Marceau, "I am too happy at the result, not to think them excellent; and I feel sure Mademoiselle Dantin shares my gratification at so agreeable a conclusion of an unpleasant matter."

"Madame!" replied the schoolmistress, darting an angry look towards her, and speaking in a tone that quivered with anger, "I might say much, but will confine myself to one remark; for no consideration would I suffer under my roof, as you seem inclined to suffer under yours, such things —"

"What things?" asked Madame Marceau.

"Such things as a modest woman does not care to mention."

Madame Marceau carried her vinaigrette to her nose with extreme dignity.

"Upon my word, Mademoiselle Dantin," said she, quietly, "you astonish me. What ideas! for an instructress of youth too; you do astonish me. I believe you are ready, Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, addressing Nathalie. "Will you be kind enough to take my arm. A servant shall come round for your trunks this evening."

Nathalie silently obeyed, but felt somewhat mortified on recollecting that she was leaving only one trunk behind her. They had reached the door, when Madame Marceau turned round, and coldly observed:

"Good evening, Mademoiselle Dantin. I think it right to observe to you, that Mademoiselle Montolieu being now under my protection, I shall consider any remark derogatory to her as a personal insult to me."

She drew herself up, and turned away. Nathalie followed her example, but not without first casting a look over the gloomy room, with the globes, the maps,

the cheerless hearth, the comfortless furniture, the ungracious and withered figure of the schoolmistress, as she sat rigidly in her chair, and feeling, with a sense of inexpressible relief, that she was leaving them all for ever.

A new page in the history of her life was indeed turned over.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE château of Sainville stood on the brow of an eminence which overlooked the quiet town of Sainville, gathered up below within the shallow compass of a little Norman valley.

A broad road, shaded by trees on either side, wound its way up the steep ascent, passed before the narrow door of the school-house and the iron gateway of the mansion, then abruptly descended the other side of the eminence, and extended far away into the open country, among yellow stubble fields and green meadows, with here and there a solitary dwelling. Of this prospect, which looked gay and pastoral in the sunshine, nothing was visible on the present evening; the moon was obscured by light clouds that slowly passed over her disc, following one another along the gloomy sky, like ships sailing in the same track, until they vanished in the distant depths of heaven; a chill breeze had risen, and its vague murmurs blended with the rustling sound of the withered leaves which it swept away from the lonely road.

On leaving the school-house, the two ladies turned away from the lingering household lights which still burned in the vale at their feet, and walked along in

silence until they reached an avenue of old and majestic elms on their left. At the end of that avenue, rose the old château. The iron gate stood open; they entered, walked to the end and ascended a flight of steps that led to the porch. Their approach seemed to have been witnessed and expected, for the door noiselessly opened to admit them. Nathalie caught a glimpse of a tall servant in black, standing in a respectful attitude in the spacious and lighted hall, a wide and majestic flight of marble steps with railings of rich iron filagree extended beyond. They entered.

"Where is my son?" asked Madame Marceau.

"Monsieur Charles left very shortly after Madame."

"Has she asked this that I may know he is gone?"

quickly thought Nathalie. She glanced around; the air of grandeur which pervaded all she saw, the obsequious tone and downcast eyes of the servant, the stately dignity of Madame Marceau as she crossed the hall with her haughty mien and her rustling robe, showed her how different was the atmosphere she was entering from that of the world she had left. She was not awed, but could scarcely help feeling impressed. They ascended the staircase in silence. Madame Marceau paused on reaching the first floor landing. In a recess stood the dark bronze statue of a female slave bearing a pale, transparent lamp, which shed around a soft and subdued light. The elder lady turned towards her companion, and laying her hand on the gilt door-handle of a wide folding-door, she observed, in her rich, full voice, looking down at Nathalie as she spoke, "I must beg leave to introduce you to my aunt the Canoness; she is very old, a little infirm, and rather deaf. I feel confident she will be charmed to

know you. Pray do not feel uneasy; she is a very simple person — extremely so. Perhaps we shall also see my brother, Monsieur de Sainville; but pray be quite at your ease.”

She spoke so graciously that Nathalie felt vexed at the trepidation which drew forth so much condescension. Daring as she was when roused by injustice, the young girl was nevertheless shy with strangers; she now felt doubly so. What would the old Canoness, probably a rigid old devotee, think of her? How could Monsieur de Sainville, that grave and, if report spoke truly, morose man, consider the obscure girl who had attracted his nephew's attention? Yet with this feeling of uneasiness there blended a strong share of curiosity to obtain a nearer view of one who, whether in good or ill, had excited much attention since his return to Sainville.

Madame Marceau, who was eyeing Nathalie keenly, appeared far from annoyed at what she could read of those feelings in the young girl's veiled countenance. Complacently patting the hand which rested on her arm, she once more exhorted her to banish all uneasiness, and opening the door, she led the way into a large, old-fashioned drawing-room, with a lofty ceiling and deep windows, now screened by thick crimson curtains that fell to the ground. Several large mirrors gave additional vastness to the apartment, and reflected in their shadowy depths the light of a lamp suspended from the ceiling. In contrast to its soft, pale rays, was the ardent glow of the wood-fire that burned on the hearth, and shone back with a deeper and more burning red from the polished surface of the surrounding furniture. The walls were hung with



pictures in heavy gilt frames; they were chiefly of family portraits, and had all the mellow tones of age. There was warmth and richness in the colouring of the whole room.

Nathalie at first shrank behind Madame Marceau and scarcely raised her eyes from the floor. She felt as if Monsieur de Sainville's keen look, of which she had often heard, were fastened upon her; when she at length looked up, blushing and slightly confused, she perceived at the further end of the apartment a very diminutive old lady, seated in a deep arm-chair, by the fire-side, and knitting with extreme rapidity. She did not pause in her occupation or take any notice of their entrance. With mingled relief and disappointment, Nathalie perceived that Monsieur de Sainville was not there. Madame Marceau, still keeping the young girl's arm within her own, and nodding in her encouraging manner, led her along the room at a slow and stately pace. As they advanced towards the fireplace, the large mirror over it reflected her fine figure, rich attire, and waving plumes; on the whole she looked very majestic. They paused on reaching the old lady's arm-chair, and gently touching the arm of her relative, Madame Marceau said in a key higher than her usual tones:

"Aunt, — dear Aunt Radegonde."

The Canoness slowly raised her head. Nathalie was captivated at once by the look of her mild blue eyes, still deep in colour, and by the kind and benignant smile which played on her features as she beheld them. A devotee she might be, but she certainly did not seem a rigid one. Her hair, of a silvery white, was parted and smoothed beneath a close lace cap;

she wore a dress of black silk brocade, very full and antique in fashion, but fitting her extremely well. On her bosom glittered a large gold cross, the sign of the gay and worldly order to which she belonged. She was evidently very old, but her neat and slender little figure had not suffered from years or lost the nicety of its proportions; she sat and knitted in a very erect fashion. Nathalie thought she had never beheld a being who realized so completely her childish beautiful ideal of the benevolent fairy.

"I have brought you Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Madame Marceau, again addressing her aunt.

"I am very glad to see her," cheerfully replied the Canoness; "the poor child looks hot; well, it is perhaps early to have a fire; for my part I think the heat a good thing at all times; besides, I am subject to rheumatism, and this old drawing-room is so cold and chill of an evening. Pray take off your bonnet and shawl, my dear, and sit here by me."

There was in her manner a kindness free from Madame Marceau's patronizing courtesy as she now took Nathalie's hand, and with a smile made her sit down on a low luxurious seat by her side, eyeing her all the time, with evident and *naïve* curiosity. Not satisfied with the imperfect glimpse which she thus obtained, she rose, and declaring that "the poor child was still too warm," she very decisively divested Nathalie of both bonnet and shawl, and remained silent and wondering before her. Nathalie was always pretty, but now the warm fire-light gave so deep a bloom to her cheek, to her eyes a light so soft, and to the clear outlines of her whole countenance, so vivid and dazzling a brightness, heightened by her dark hair

and sombre attire, that Aunt Radegonde could not but look at her with a mute surprise, which soon subsided into the smiling complacency the sight of youth and beauty inspires in those whom old age has mellowed, not soured. The language of her admiring glance was one beauty learns to read early, and a smile, half-shy, half-pleased, trembled on Nathalie's parted lips. The Canoness turned towards her niece, and, raising herself on tiptoe to reach her ear, she mysteriously whispered with a shrewd nod in the direction of Nathalie:

"She is very pretty."

The young girl coloured deeply and stooped as if to arrange her hair. Madame Marceau did not reply. She too looked at Nathalie with a surprise verging on admiration, but far from implying pleasure.

"I cannot blame poor Charles so much," continued the Canoness, in the same audible key which she mistook for the lowest whisper.

"Hush, aunt," said her niece, with imperious tone and darkening brow.

"We shall see whether our critical Armand will find fault with that face," added the indiscreet Canoness, with visible triumph.

Nathalie looked very much disconcerted. Armand was the christian name of Monsieur de Sainville. Madame Marceau pressed the arm of her aunt, and slightly apologized to the young girl, reminding her that her relative was, as she had informed her, a little deaf. She spoke with a significant look, and in a loud key.

"Deaf!" echoed Aunt Radegonde, much nettled. "Indeed I hear as well as most people; every one is

more or less deaf; the only difference is in the quantity. Then as to what I said, I do not think it was so offensive that you need have pinched my arm, Rosalie. In my time, young girls liked to be thought pretty, and when they were pretty, young men were very apt to find it out too."

With a haughty nod, that implied "take that," to her niece, the Canoness walked back to her arm-chair, stiffly sat down, and rapidly knitted away, erect and dignified. Madame Marceau's lip curled as she looked down at her aunt for a moment; but her glance soon reverted to Nathalie, whom she keenly eyed from head to foot, without seeming to notice that the young girl returned her scrutinizing look. The lady stood facing her, near the fire-place, bare-headed, but with the Indian shawl that seemed as a portion of her dignity, still negligently draped around her person. Nathalie was struck with the resemblance her handsome features bore to those of her son; but the same sharpness of outline and careworn expression marred their beauty. The look which she now cast on the young girl was fixed and moody, but when their eyes suddenly chanced to meet, she smiled very blandly.

"Aunt," said she, addressing her relative in a most gracious tone; "would you believe that this terrible old schoolmistress would scarcely let me see mademoiselle!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Aunt Radegonde, forgetting her resentment. She quickly looked round at Nathalie, suspended her knitting, cast her head up sideways, in an interrogative listening sort of fashion, probably rendered imperative and habitual by her infirmity and short stature, and thus displayed the profile of a little

*Gallic nez retroussé*, strongly indicative of inquisitiveness.

"Mademoiselle Dantin was irritable this evening," quietly said Nathalie, feeling a reply was expected.

"Is she often so?" promptly asked the Canoness.

"Yes, pretty often," answered Nathalie smiling.

"Then you did not like her?"

"We did not agree; — our tempers were different." She spoke coldly; she did not love Mademoiselle Dantin, but she scorned to attack her.

"Ah!" slowly said Aunt Radegonde, who seemed to expect more. "Indeed!" she ejaculated, after a pause; but as this produced nothing, she quietly resumed her knitting.

"There is much to try the temper of persons, in Mademoiselle Dantin's dependant position," charitably observed Madame Marceau. "She is, I suppose, neither better nor worse than most individuals of her class. Mademoiselle Montolieu, let me hope that you will have some refreshment."

Without waiting for objection or reply, she rang the bell. Almost immediately a servant entered, bearing a tray covered with delicacies. Madame Marceau carelessly signed him to place it on a small table near Nathalie. As soon as he retired, she politely pressed her guest to take something; when the young girl complied, to please her, she retired to a low settee, where she reclined majestically, supported by a pile of cushions, not exactly looking at Nathalie, but keeping her within view. But inexperienced as she was, Nathalie had the finesse of a southern and a woman. She felt that she had been introduced into that stately drawing-room, with emblazoned ceiling, and antique

furniture, gleaming in the red fire-light, in order to be dazzled by the sight of unaccustomed magnificence. She had been a little disconcerted at first; now she felt quite composed.

"How sorry I am," observed Madame Marceau, casting a gracious look towards her guest, "that my brother, Monsieur de Sainville, does not spend this evening with us. He would I am sure have been charmed to see Mademoiselle Montolieu. Besides," she thoughtfully added, "when one is so happy as to have a brother, and every one is not so fortunate —"

"Have you got a brother, my dear?" interrupted her aunt, addressing Nathalie with her interrogative air.

"No Madame; I have only a sister."

"Does she live in Sainville?" asked the Canoness.

"Generally she does; but now Rose is at Rouen, for a week."

"Rose! what a pretty name! May I ask to know yours; there is much meaning in names; mine is Radegonde, from Sainte Radegonde, one of our earliest queens. Yours is — Nathalie! Ah!" And the Canoness became suddenly meditative.

"Nathalie!" carelessly observed Madame Marceau who had however been listening with evident attention; "Nathalie! Did we not know a lady of that name at Marseilles, aunt."

"Marseilles!" echoed Aunt Radegonde, "why, are you from the south, my dear?" she suddenly asked, as if the idea had not occurred to her before.

"I am a Provençal."

"I might have known it, by your quick piquant way of speaking, so unlike our long nasal Norman

accent; you have got a touch of the southern tongue, and very pleasant it is too," she added, smiling.


"Nathalie Montolieu!" abstractedly observed her niece; "yes, the name is decidedly southern."

"Montolieu! is that your other name, my dear? why Rosalie, how can you call that a southern name? I am sure, now you mention it, that it is a Sainville name; have you forgotten the Docteur Montolieu, who attended on my poor Lucile, and who, when you became a widow, wished so much to marry you!"

Madame Marceau gave her aunt a rapid and indignant look, whilst Nathalie quietly observed:

"That Docteur Montolieu was my father; he left Sainville after the death of his first wife, and went to Arles, where he married my mother."

Madame Marceau looked thunderstruck at the unexpected revelation, which so suddenly lessened the distance between herself and the daughter of the man who had formerly aspired to the honour of her hand. She had been many years away from Sainville, and did not so much as know of the doctor's second marriage. Mademoiselle Dantin had dryly informed her, that Nathalie was a Provençal, and pretended to know no more; this fact, confirmed by the young girl's southern accents, had completely misled her. Curious, however, to know who her guest really was, she had, accordingly to her usual tactics, when there was a secret in the way, put her aunt on the track; the result had far surpassed her wishes and expectations. Indeed there was now something pitiable in her consternation; in the nervous tremor with which she used her vinaigrette, and in the hurried affectation of pleasantry with which she treated



her aunt's assertion, and strove to check the torrent of her voluble astonishment at this coincidence.

"Yes, I remember Docteur Montolieu; a good honest man, as you say, aunt — very strange coincidence — extremely so. Mademoiselle Montolieu, I can see you are oppressed with fatigue; allow me to show you to your room."

Nathalie rose, but the Canoness would kiss her very affectionately before she went, and holding her hand, ask her how long her father had been dead; tell her what a very clever man he was; how he had attended her during a long illness, and hint mysteriously that if Rosalie had only wished, she might now have been her—Nathalie's—mamma; to all of which her haughty niece was compelled to listen with powerless indignation, until at length unable to bear more, she hurried the young girl out of the apartment. She smoothed her brow, and resumed all her composure, as the drawing-room door closed upon them, and drowned the sounds of Aunt Radegonde's voice.

Graciously requesting Nathalie to follow her, she led the way up another flight of the wide staircase. The shadowy height of the ceilings, the statues and objects of art which adorned every recess, and the breadth of the stairs, impressed Nathalie by a certain grandeur of design which belongs to old mansions. On reaching the second-floor landing, lit like the first, they turned into a long and narrow passage or gallery, as the lady called it, with doors on either side. These, as Madame Marceau informed the young girl, in an impressive tone, — these were the doors of the sleeping apartments of the château; they had been



inhabited in turn by the whole of the family since the edifice was first erected.

"And this is your room, Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, opening the last door, and entering a small octagon room hung with blue damask, somewhat faded, and lit by a crystal lamp suspended from the low ceiling. "We are now in one of the four turrets of the château," she continued, nodding and smiling at the young girl. Her look, tone, and bearing bespoke inward complacency.

"How fine the view must be!" cried Nathalie, charmed with her apartment.

"All the views are fine from the château of Sainville," replied the stately lady; "indeed, I may say, they are celebrated. My room is close to yours; I mention this, lest you should imagine yourself secluded like some châtelaine of old, in this, 'blue room of the western tower,' which has received more than one real châtelaine. Indeed, I hope you are not afraid of spirits: it is said to be haunted."

Then followed a legend of two beautiful sisters, Constance and Adelaide de Sainville, who had successively tenanted this apartment, and both died there in the last century. Constance had fitted it up as her oratory, and retired to it daily for meditation and prayer; she died young, pure and happy. After her death, it became the sleeping apartment of Adelaide, a gay and voluptuous lady, who caused the walls, left bare by the ascetic Constance, to be hung with soft silken damask, and introduced the downy couch, the mirror and crystal lamp, preserving only the plain wooden *prie-dieu* as a token of her sister's presence. She, too, it seemed, had died young, but

neither resigned nor happy. On the last day of her life she caused herself to be attired in all the gorgeous splendour of the old court costume, surveyed herself in the mirror, and, with many sighs and tears, bade youth and beauty farewell. Her restless spirit was said to haunt the spot. Madame Marceau smilingly assured the young girl this was only an idle report. But though she spoke of the blue room of the western tower, and of the family legends, with seeming carelessness, her studied fluency of speech, as she recalled those associations of the past, betrayed her secret satisfaction and inward pride. She seemed gratified at Nathalie's attention.

"It is wrong in me," she said, "to be detaining you from your rest; good night, Mademoiselle Montolieu; may your first night's sleep under the roof of our house be peaceful and happy."

She spoke with the stately courtesy of a real châtelaine, drew the young girl towards her, stooped — for she was much taller — imprinted a kiss on her forehead, and glided out of the room.

It was not until the sound of her steps died away in the passage, and on the distant staircase, that Nathalie felt herself alone. She sat down on a low couch, and leaning back, looked around her with naïf and childish interest. The bed stood before her in a deep recess, shrouded by curtains of the clearest muslin; near it stood the wooden *prie-dieu* of the devout Constance, and not far from it, on a low cabinet of carved ebony, the gleaming oval mirror, with its tarnished frame, in which her more earthly sister surveyed herself before she died. These reminiscences charmed the romantic mind of Nathalie. The quaint

old china which adorned the mantel-shelf, the pictures of shepherds and shepherdesses in hoops, and even a discoloured mother-of-pearl table and work-box, gave a new interest to everything around her; the sight of her trunk, unperceived till then, suddenly recalled her from the past to the present.

This day had been one of the few eventful days in her quiet life, and it now returned to her in its minutest incidents, with the fuss of the morning; the prize ceremony, at which she laughed, but which amused and interested her, in spite of her laughing; the breaking up, and the parting from a few pet pupils, who crowded around her, and gave her many a farewell kiss. She remembered how, when all was over, she had gone up to her room, and watched from the window a carriage, which bore away a gay young creature of sixteen, who was to return no more to school; how sad she felt, as that carriage wound along the dusty road, and vanished in the distance; how longingly she looked at the unknown regions of happiness and pleasure, that extended beyond those green hills, and felt like a lady of romance, captive in her solitary bower, guarded by the Dantin dragon. How she wept a little at her loneliness, and then dried her tears, and read till dusk, when she went down to the garden to dream away an hour, until called in for quarrel, reproach, and dismissal. The interview with Charles Marceau, the scene with Mademoiselle Dantin, the meeting with the little Chevalier, the sudden appearance of Madame Marceau, — all came back to her with the vividness of reality, until at length recalled the most startling remembrance of all: she, the poor dependant girl, was now a guest in the château

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of Sainville. She looked around her, and smiled to herself, then rose, and opened the window, a real Gothic casement, with lozenge panes in lead casings. The night was dark; she could see nothing, save a bright light burning in the turret facing her. Through the glass panes and thin muslin curtains appeared the figure of a man, slowly pacing the room up and down. He looked taller than Charles Marceau, who, moreover, was not at home. Nathalie's heart beat a little; for though the distance was too great for her to distinguish his features, she felt that she was gazing on the master of Sainville. She softly closed the window, and, after a little fit of musing, extinguished the lamp, and took possession of the downy bed which had formerly received the beautiful Adelaide. As the young girl sank into her voluptuous couch, and, by the faint, glimmering light which the dying lamp still shed, gazed on the antique, but not ungraceful, furniture of her apartment, she asked herself if some Arabian genie had not transported her there from the bare room she occupied at Mademoiselle Dantin's. None but pleasant visions now flitted before her; everything seemed bright and hopeful as a fairy tale; the sense of security and rest, after the storms and chances of the day, was blended with the pleasurable sensation of her luxurious couch. As she abandoned herself to this indolent repose, thought gradually became less distinct; but her bed faced the window; the light still burned in the turret opposite, and every now and then she caught a glimpse of the dark figure, moving to and fro in its monotonous promenade. The sight exercised an irresistible and mysterious fascination upon her; every time the figure came

within view, her look followed it until it vanished. At length, oppressed with fatigue and sleep, her eyes closed; the light still shone opposite, but she heeded it not; dreams, hopes, and mysterious imaginings had faded away; her head reclined on her pillow; her hands lay folded on her bosom: she had fallen into deep and peaceful slumber.

## CHAPTER V.

THE sun had risen; the sky was serene and blue, and the birds sang on a group of tall poplars near her window, when Nathalie awoke on the following morning. She rose quickly, and merely throwing a shawl around her, she hastened to open the window with childish impatience. Though she prudently kept in the background, lest she might be seen from the garden, or any part of the building, she could still enjoy the cool morning breeze, and the greater portion of the fine prospect below her.

It was a calm morning, silent, and somewhat chill; the sky, of a pale blue, was still tinged with the grey of early morn, save in the east, where the soft, rosy light of dawn still lingered. The trees, some of them already sere and yellow, were seen through a hazy mist, that glittered in the long horizontal rays of light; the freshness of earth and sky told the earliness of the hour.

Beneath her, Nathalie beheld the garden, with its three terraces, the last of which descended to the very edge of the shallow river that wound along Sainville; this garden now looked a small space in the midst of the surrounding grounds. Her glance rested for a

while on its gravel walks, trim boxwood hedges, grass-plots, and marble statues; then wandered over the grounds, laid out with graceful clumps of trees and groves of stately pine. At a distance, she beheld a little artificial lake, with its dark waters, that seemed to lie sleeping in the solemn shadow of a wide-spreading and melancholy cedar; farther on, in a still more secluded spot, rose a white temple, gleaming amidst the dark foliage of surrounding firs. Save on the side of Mademoiselle Dantin's school, the gardener's art had succeeded in concealing every trace of a boundary. Nathalie could only estimate the extent of the grounds by the landscape beyond; it spread far away on the other side of the winding road; and a fair Norman landscape it was, with low, swelling hills, secluded hamlets in green valleys, and silvery streams, glancing in the morning sun, now gliding visible through fertile plains, or winding far away in dark and overhanging woods. Nathalie looked long and eagerly.

"This cool Normandy is beautiful, after all," she thought, whilst her heart filled with admiration and joy. True joy is almost always religious; and it was before that open window, her hands clasped, her eyes still fixed on the glorious works of God, the cool breeze fanning her brow, that Nathalie slowly repeated her morning orisons. The house was still silent; she dressed leisurely, with more than usual care, and hesitated long between two very simple muslin dresses, one blue, the other pink; the pink was chosen as most becoming. During the progress of her toilet she never looked at the glass; Mademoiselle Dantin forbade all such toys of vanity to the teachers of her establishment, and long habit enabled Nathalie to do without their

aid, but when she had seen that not one ungraceful fold disfigured the light drapery of her attire, that her hair, in spite of its becoming negligence, was quite secure, she turned towards the mirror, and wondered with a smile, "if Adelaide de Sainville had been so very much more beautiful."

Unlike those heroines who are as unconscious of their own loveliness as is a lamp of the light it diffuses, Nathalie knew very well that she was handsome, and often rejoiced in the consciousness of her fresh and youthful beauty, which, though it had failed to soften the morose schoolmistress, rendered her, and this also she knew, very pleasant and delightful in the eyes of others. But personal vanity was, after all, her least defect; she had other faults far more serious, far more fatal to herself and others, and without which this story need never have been written.

A thin, sallow but smartly-attired *femme-de-chambre*, in fantastic cap and extravagantly small apron, disturbed her reflections.

"Mon Dieu!" she observed with the fluency of speech and elegant precision of accent of the Parisian, "I hope I have not disturbed mademoiselle. Madame would be in despair. Madame only sent me to know whether mademoiselle needed my assistance, and would breakfast in her own room or in the *salle-à-manger*."

She spoke thus with a rapid look that comprised everything in the room from the least straggling article of dress down to Nathalie's solitary trunk. The young girl thanked her quietly, said she would breakfast below, and followed down stairs the polite *femme-de-chambre*, who offered to show her the way. She found the Canoness and her niece alone in the dining-

room, a wide and cheerful-looking apartment on the ground floor, with a large glass door that led into a small quadrangular court, beyond which extended the garden. Aunt Radegonde nodded to Nathalie with smiling welcome; Madame Marceau did not see or appear to see her until she stood by her side. She then exclaimed:

"Mademoiselle Montolieu!" with an apologetic start, half rose from her chair, held out the tips of her fingers to Nathalie with stately grace, and, sinking back in her seat, "hoped she had slept well." She hoped with a tone and look that said every one did sleep well, or ought to sleep well in the château of Sainville. With a smile Nathalie thanked her: "her sleep was always good." "Indeed!" said Madame Marceau, with a peculiar look; perhaps she thought it vulgar, as it no doubt is, to sleep soundly; at all events she drew out and applied the vinaigrette.

Good breeding and refinement, or rather the externals of these qualities, are generally considered as wholly precluding those vulgar manifestations of ill-temper, rudeness, impertinence, and similar feelings, which the unsophisticated display with such perfect frankness. But it does not thence follow that the well-bred and refined have not their little spites, little envious feelings, little assumptions of consequence to gratify; indeed they do gratify them very freely; all the difference lies in the manner; for there is a finish, a delicacy of touch in the polite impertinence of the well-bred which the under-bred may envy, but must never hope to attain. The slight that can be conveyed in a glance, in a gracious smile, in a wave of the hand, is often the *ne plus ultra* of art: what insult



is so keen or so keenly felt as the polite insult which it is impossible to resent?

Madame Marceau, without being a very clever woman, had some talent and proficiency in this amiable accomplishment. She could put down any one, especially another woman, in the most gracious manner. She never was rude; indeed she was always studiously polite, courteous and stately, as so great a lady should be. Her manner was easy, her speech was fluent, her voice was soft; but her grace was only manner; her courtesy sprang from jealous pride. When the fortunes of her family were at their lowest ebb, Rosalie de Sainville had married a rich plebeian merchant of Havre, whose speedy ruin and death left her the bitter regret of a useless *mésalliance*. The sudden restoration of family dignity effected by her brother, awoke in all its strength her embittered and long-repressed pride. In spite of her long line of ancestors she had still something of the *parvenue*; she felt more jealous of her original position than if she had never descended from it; others might afford to be simple and careless of rank; she felt that she could not, especially with Nathalie. Two sins lay at the young girl's door: she had attracted the attention of Charles Marceau; worse still, she was the daughter of a man who, in Madame Marceau's fallen fortunes and humbled state, had, without undue presumption, hoped to make her his wife.

The breakfast, at which Monsieur de Sainville did not appear, was a plain meal. Madame Marceau held *bourgeois* abundance in horror; but it was served in costly Sèvres porcelain, on silver salvers, with the crest of the Sainvilles. Nathalie bore the studied politeness of her hostess with perfect calmness; she re-

ceived the courtesy as genuine, and allowed the impertinence to drop all harmless at her feet. The repast, though thus converted into a sort of tilt *avec armes courtoises*, was quiet enough. The naïve curiosity and garrulousness of the Canoness amused Nathalie, but evidently provoked her niece, who coloured, and bit her lip at every fresh indiscretion of Aunt Radegonde. As soon as breakfast was over, Madame Marceau proposed a walk in the garden, to Nathalie, who readily assented. The Canoness seemed willing to accompany them, but her niece reminded her, in her kindest tones, "that those early walks always fatigued her so much." Aunt Radegonde yielded, with evident regret.

The garden was laid out in the stately style of Louis XIV's reign. Broad gravel walks surrounded quaintly-shaped plots of flowers; low hedges of box-wood, cut close, with niches for statues of heathen deities, crossed one another in intricate windings, or extended into little avenues, ornamented on either side with long rows of stiff orange-trees, in their green boxes, and a sparkling *jet d'eau* rose into the air from a large marble fish-pond in the middle of the first terrace. Notwithstanding the monotony of this style of gardening, which made it quite a relief when they came to a secluded grass-plot, with its solitary nymph, Nathalie was struck with its antique majesty and grandeur of design, both of which at once seemed to carry her back to the stately age of the magnificent Louis XIV. Madame Marceau, who paced the broad walks with slow step and erect majesty of bearing, smiled complacently at her frankly-expressed admiration.

"Yes," she carelessly observed, "this old gardening is, as you say, very characteristic. This garden

was designed by the famous Le Nôtre. It suits the style of the château; *Renaissance*, as you know, of course. On the spot which the present building occupies, once stood a rude Gothic pile, erected by Hugo, first sire of Sainville; for we never had a title in our family; we are the De Sainvilles — no more."

"Like the old Rohans of Brittany," demurely said Nathalie, quoting the old motto, "Roi ne puis; Prince ne daigne; Rohan je suis."

"Precisely," replied Madame Marceau, much gratified. "You have quite a knowledge of history, Mademoiselle Montolieu, and you are right; titles are the gifts of kings; but what court favour can bestow blood and race?"

"I wonder where you got your plebeian name of Marceau?" thought Nathalie, glancing at the proud lady, who continued:

"Armand de Sainville erected, under the reign of Francis I., the present château, on which his scutcheon and motto still appear."

"Pray what is the true sense of that motto?" asked Nathalie.

Madame Marceau shook her head and smiled.

"A sensitive point, Mademoiselle Montolieu — a sensitive point," she significantly replied. "The vulgar legend, which you have no doubt heard, says that this only desire was one of love, but it is not so."

"Indeed!"

"No, Mademoiselle Montolieu, it is not so. The truth is," she added, with great candour, "that we are the most obstinate, *têtu* race in all Normandy. When we wish for a thing, no matter what, — say a horse, a picture, a piece of land, anything, in short, — we

must have it, no matter at what price; indeed, we will have it. It is just the same when we oppose a thing; that thing cannot take place; all our energies go against it; we oppose that thing, in short."

"Extraordinary firmness," said Nathalie, with ill-concealed irony.

"No, Mademoiselle Montolieu; I beg your pardon; no, it is not firmness," said Madame Marceau, with dignified denial. "Heaven forbid that I should thus screen our fatal hereditary failing. No; it is mere obstinacy, mere haughty will — the will of the De Sainvilles."

"Why, Madam, you will make me feel quite timid," observed Nathalie, smiling.

"Nay, nay, I hope not," graciously rejoined the elder lady; "I assure you we are far from wishing to inspire such feelings; besides, you must not think that we are merely obstinate. No, my dear Mademoiselle Montolieu," she added, bending her dark and searching glance on the young girl's frank face, "we can indeed be enemies; but we must be provoked: and, believe me, to those who confide in us, we can be friends, — true friends."

She familiarly drew Nathalie's arm within her own, and softly laid her handsome hand, all sparkling with jewels, on the young girl's, as she thus addressed her, with much emotion. The look, tone, and gesture were so significant, that Nathalie felt as if a reply were expected; but as she did not happen to be in a mood to answer so much condescension suitably, she remained silent. They had reached by this the end of the first terrace, and were going to descend a flight of steps that led to the second, when Madame Mar-

cean, who kindly attributed the young girl's silence to timidity, paused, to let her look at the fine prospect over the surrounding grounds. She listened to her expressions of admiration with as much complacency as if she had been the exclusive mistress of all they beheld.

"We are making great improvements," said she, speaking, as usual, in the plural number, and in her own stately way; "planting trees, whose growth we shall never see; but as the property remains in the family, that is not of much consequence."

"I had always understood," heedlessly observed Nathalie, "that Monsieur de Sainville was the last of his name."

Madame Marceau bit her lip, but drew herself up with cool *hauteur*.

"Monsieur de Sainville may be the last of his name," she drily replied; "but though he has no child, and does not intend marrying, he has a nephew, Mademoiselle Montolieu, who succeeds, of course, not only to the family property, but, what is far more important, to the family name. Well, André, what is it?" she added, somewhat sharply.

This question was addressed to a sun-burnt looking man, a gardener, seemingly, and who now stood before Madame Marceau in a respectful attitude. "I have taken the liberty of addressing Madame," said he, in a submissive tone, "in the hope that Madame would be kind enough to intercede for me."

"Well, what is it?" said the lady, smiling encouragingly.

"Oh! if I only knew it, I assure Madame that I should not complain; but it is hard to be dismissed

for neglect of orders, without so much as knowing what order has been neglected. Yet if Madame would only speak for me, Monsieur would perhaps relent for the sake of my wife and children."

Madame Marceau looked disconcerted for a moment; but she soon recovered with a cough, and observed, with dignified gravity:

"André, you know us; we are just, liberal masters, but we require, we exact obedience. I verily believe we would sooner forgive dishonesty itself than neglect of orders. I think I told you so expressly when you entered our service; I feel sorry for you, but you must leave."

"But surely, Madame will feel how hard it is to go this very day; to be sure Monsieur has been extremely liberal, and told the steward to give me not only my due, but much more; still it is hard to leave one's work unfinished; there is a whole plantation that another will only spoil, I am sure. If I could only have had longer notice, and if Monsieur had not been so strict in saying that I must leave this very day —"

"Impossible, André," interrupted Madame Marceau; "it is our maxim, our settled principle, — rather to pay double what we owe than to keep a servant with whom we feel dissatisfied. You have been treated on that principle; I feel sorry for you; but we cannot break through such rules for any individual case."

"But perhaps Madame, who knows all about it, will be good enough to tell me what orders I have neglected," persisted André. "I should have asked Monsieur himself if he had not left the château so early; and the steward assured me Monsieur had only

said 'neglect of orders.' I should always feel grateful if Madame would only tell me."

Madame Marceau drew herself up with mysterious majesty.

"We are not in the habit of giving explanations." said she, coldly; "you can go, André; we wish to continue our walk. Tell your wife to speak to Amanda before she leaves; Amanda will, I dare say, have something for her. We wish you well, André, but our rules and principles must be carried out."

A wave of the hand told the supplicant that he was dismissed.

"Poor fellow!" ejaculated Madame Marceau, as he left them; "I really compassionate his case, but some faults are positively quite unpardonable."

A quick step in the gravel walk behind them caused Madame Marceau to look round as she spoke thus. The new-comer was the elegant lady's maid.

"Madame," said she, hastily addressing her mistress.

"Amanda," severely interrupted Madame Marceau, "how is this? Have I not made it a particular request that my morning walk should never be interrupted? But this is not the only recent instance of neglect of orders I have discovered. Why it was only this morning I perceived the thing I had expressly asked you to do had been omitted. Amanda, I may say, and you probably know it, every one indeed knows it, that justness mingled with due strictness is our family peculiarity. We are kind masters, we pay well, but obeyed we will be. Amanda, why did you not put the Valenciennes lace quilling around my morning gown?"

"I am sure," demurely said Amanda, "that disrespect of Madame's orders was the last thing I intended; but I would not put on the quilling until I had appealed to Madame's excellent taste. For as I was saying, my late mistress, Madame la Comtesse d'Onesson, would never allow me to put any quilling to her morning gowns. She would not hear of such a thing, even in her last illness."

"Madame d'Onesson had her way and I have mine," frigidly said Madame Marceau; "I beg that in future you will attend to my orders; there is André, whom we have been compelled to dismiss for similar negligence. It is extraordinary, but really servants do not seem to understand that we have them to do that which we request to have done. And now, may I know why, in spite of my prohibition, you have interrupted my walk?"

"Only to give Madame this letter," modestly replied Amanda, respectfully handing a letter to her mistress as she spoke; "and I am sure, if the man who brought it had not said it was from Monsieur Charles and very important, I should never have taken the liberty of breaking through Madame's express rules; for, as I was saying, we all know that Madame is as strict as she is generous."

Madame Marceau coughed a mollified cough, and slightly apologizing to Nathalie, she opened and read the letter. Her countenance darkened as she perused the contents.

"Where is the man who brought this?" she asked, in her sharpest tones.

"In the hall, waiting for Madame's answer."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, will you excuse me; I



find I must go in, and it would be a sin to ask you to return to the house on so fine a morning."

Nathalie having declared that she would indeed greatly prefer continuing her walk, she was left alone. She thoughtfully descended the steps leading to the second terrace, wondering why the letter from her son had annoyed Madame Marceau so much, and whether it bore any reference to herself.

She found that this second terrace was laid out in the same antique style which distinguished the first. A low wall covered with ivy, and partly concealed by a semicircle of evergreens, extended between the flights of steps that led down to the terrace on either side. Attracted by a low plashing sound, Nathalie stepped within the space thus inclosed. She found herself in a narrow grass plot, with a plain stone fountain in the centre. A clear, slender jet of water rose into the air, and fell down again into its shallow basin with the sound she had heard. In a low, broad niche, hollowed out of the ivied wall, reclined the figure of a sculptured nymph. One arm supported her head, the other hung down loosely by her side; her eyes were closed; her marble features expressed the serenity of sleep; the whole attitude was one of deep repose. A bee-hive stood close by. Nathalie paused and wondered as she looked, in what consisted the charm of this narrow spot. In its seclusion, and the sense of solitude by which it was accompanied — in the dark and melancholy foliage of those northern trees — in the fair image of sleep, hallowing all around, and seemingly lulled to its deep slumbers by the low sound of falling waters and the bee's murmuring hum — lay that charm, unexplained, though deeply felt.

Another flight of steps led Nathalie to the end of the garden, if garden it might be called, being now a mere grassy slope bounded by the river, and extending without further barrier into the grounds. On her left, she beheld at a distance the wall which divided Monsieur de Sainville's property from Mademoiselle Dantin's garden. On her right, she could see nothing save wide lawns, with groves of spreading beech-trees, dark masses of the pyramidal pine, and the little lake shining in the distance.

As she walked down to the water's edge, stepping into the high and waving grass which filled the air with its wild fragrance, a whole crowd of tiny winged insects arose on her path. She paused near the hollow trunk of a decayed willow; near her a group of silver-leaved aspens trembled in the sun with a low rustling sound; the water flowed quietly in its pebbly bed; whilst around was heard the ceaseless hum of the bees from the neighbouring hive. On the opposite bank, formed by the wide arch of two large beech-trees, whose spreading shadow slept over the dark yet transparent waters of the river at her feet, extended a rural landscape of calm loveliness. A narrow pasture valley, sheltered by green hills; a herd of cattle grazing quietly in the cool morning shade; the light mists fading away before the early sun; no human dwelling visible, but everything wrapt in the silence and repose of the hour, — formed a scene so tranquil and so fair that it instantly reminded Nathalie of a picture by Claude Lorraine which she had seen as a child in an old château of Provence. The absence of all ungraceful objects — the clear, golden-coloured light — the deep and almost holy serenity of

his favourite scenes — marked everything she now saw. She was turning away from this lovely prospect with regret, when she suddenly stopped short, as if rooted to the earth. Charles Marceau stood before her.

With the exception that this was day, and that it was evening when she saw him before, Nathalie might have imagined this to be the continuation of their former interview. The young man looked as cool and composed as when in Mademoiselle Dantin's garden; more so, indeed, he could not look. He stood in the same attitude, with his face turned towards Nathalie. His features, thin, pale, and yet strikingly handsome, looked thinner and paler from the mass of dark hair which fell down almost to his shoulders. The expression of the brow and mouth instantly reminded Nathalie of Madame Marceau; but the eyes, large, clear, and hazel, like her's, had another look. This might be from the eyelids, which drooped rather too much, or from the nearness and fixedness of the pupils, which now rendered it difficult for Nathalie to meet his glance, and made her feel not so much that he was looking at her, as that he looked in the direction in which she stood. In return to his deep salutation, she gave him a frigid bow. He stood so exactly before her that it was not easy for her to walk on.

"I see you are still deeply offended," said he, in that low and musical tone which, in spite of her anger, had struck her on the preceding evening; "alas! can penitence for a past error avail nothing?"

He paused, as if expecting an answer. Nathalie, however, with serious mien and downcast look, gave him none.

"Pray remember," he continued, "how I stood

placed. We often met: I might look, but never speak; I might write, yet hope for no reply; I loved you, but might not tell it."

Nathalie coloured, and hastened to interrupt him. "I will forgive last evening's intrusion," said she coldly, "on condition it is never mentioned again."

"You forgive me," he replied; "is that all?"

Nathalie looked up with surprise. She met his look; it had now the keen and watchful expression which had already struck her. Seeing that she did not speak, he continued —

"We are told to forgive our enemies. Is there, for those that love us, no other feeling than forgiveness?"

"I understand you, Sir," said Nathalie, eyeing him with a firm, clear look; "but I am not bound to answer a feeling I never sought, nor to feel gratitude —"

"Gratitude!" he interrupted, with something like scorn; "who speaks of gratitude? I detest gratitude — it is only fit for slavish souls, whom benefits can win. It is a feeling I have never known, and care not to exact — least of all from you — you," he added, in a lower tone, "who inspire me with another ambition, and far other hopes."

Nathalie looked annoyed and disdainful.

"I believe," quietly continued Charles Marceau, "that by speaking thus I impress you unfavourably. Forgive me; I must speak as I feel, and that is within no sphere of conventional or formal rules. You may think me presumptuous, yet trust me, I do not mistake your present feelings. I will not say that you hate me, that I am disagreeable to you; I believe I

am totally indifferent to you, and that, comparatively speaking, you care no more for me than for the grass beneath your feet."

The last words were uttered with much bitterness; yet, to Nathalie's surprise, the young man composedly resumed:

"I am content it should be so; I am content to find you proud and disdainful, if such is your whim. A hundred times sooner would I see you thus, than find you yielding a feeble return to feelings you will never understand until the day arrives when you fully share them."

"And that day, Sir," sharply replied Nathalie, who felt irritated at the tone he had taken, "is, I promise you, still far distant."

Charles did not seem alarmed at this threat. He smiled again. "Once more," said he, "I must beg of you to forgive me if my speech is not confined within conventional limits. Nothing is further from my intention than to utter a word calculated to offend you. If, cold as you are now, I yet express a belief in your future affection, that belief is not founded on my own merits. I trust to the depth and fervour of my love for return."

"We will not argue that point," coldly said Nathalie; "Madame Marceau is waiting for me. Be so good as to allow me to proceed."

"One moment more, I beseech you," submissively said Charles Marceau; "I depart to-day for Paris: many months must elapse before I behold you again. Whilst your thought and image remain ever present to me, may I hope you will sometimes remember me?"

Nathalie, highly indignant at this request, could not repress the taunt which rose to her lips.

"Sir," said she, with an ironical smile, destined to punish his presumption, "you have so much faith and hope at your command, that you can well dispense with so paltry an auxiliary as memory."

"You are severe," bitterly replied Charles Marceau, whilst his cheek took a sallow tinge; "but," he added, with a fixed look, which made her colour rise, "you cannot and shall not prevent me from loving you, and that with a passion and fervour which, could they be revealed by words, would not, perhaps, leave you quite so calm and cold as I leave you now."

He turned away without another word or look.

## CHAPTER VI.

NATHALIE remained standing in the same place as if rooted to the spot by indignant amazement. Her colour rose and she bit her lip, alike vexed and astonished at herself for having allowed the young man to proceed so far unchecked.

The incident of the letter recurred to her as particularly significant: she could not doubt that it was the means Charles Marceau had taken to meet her. The concealment of which he made use showed her very plainly the light in which his family viewed his attachment.

"They need not fear," she thought, with secret scorn; "the poor teacher of Mademoiselle Dantin's school will not find it so hard to live without the heir of the great Sainville race, who, though so daring with her, can, it seems, be timid enough with them."

Not caring for a longer walk she returned to the château. She would willingly have proceeded to her own room at once, but the Canoness meeting her on the staircase made her enter the drawing-room; Madame Marceau was not present. Aunt Radegonde took her usual place, made the young girl sit down on the low seat by her side, began to knit, and asked how she liked the garden.

"Yes," she thoughtfully observed, when Nathalie had said how much she liked it; "yes, our old château is a pleasant place; here was I born and bred, and so were Armand and Rosalie; and here I lived until my poor brother died, when Armand said at once the place must be sold to help to cover his father's debts, and passed his word to the creditors to work out the rest, no matter at what cost. He went away for years, — we had to go to Havre; yet I never have understood how Sainville could be sold."

"And was it sold?" asked Nathalie.

"I suppose so; for other people came and we left; but they changed nothing. This room looks just as it looked on the day when I stood at the door and turned round to take a last glance."

"How glad you must have been to return," said Nathalie, touched at her simplicity and frankness.

The Canoness laid her little hand on the young girl's shoulder, and looked wistfully into her face. "My dear child," she sadly replied, "may you never know how sad the place we once loved best may become. Sorrowful as I was when I left, I left not alone; but I was alone when I returned. I found nothing but gaiety going on, — but it was mirth that saddened

me; the house was full of company, — to me it seemed vacant."

She looked around her, and her eyes filled with tears; but age loves not to dwell on sorrowful recollections, — the cloud soon passed away from the cheerful features of the Canoness. She urged Nathalie to speak, and peremptorily forbade her to call her Madame, which she pronounced much too formal.

"Though, to be sure," she added, drawing herself up, "I have a right to the title, being a Canoness. I am not, Mademoiselle, — which would be ridiculous at my age, — but Madame Radegonde de Sainville, and so the servants, whom I keep at a great distance, always call me; but you, — let me see, — do you mind calling me Marraine? I might very well be your godmother. Indeed, I feel almost confident that if your poor father had married some one of Sainville, instead of going off to Provence for a wife, I should have been your godmother. Well, shall it be Marraine, or is your real godmother still living?"

"No, she was my aunt, and died three years ago in Provence."

"And have you no friends in Sainville, Petite?"

"None, save my sister, who was brought up here," replied Nathalie, smiling at the familiar name the Canoness had already found for her.

"But your sister is very fond of you, I am sure," shrewdly rejoined Aunt Radegonde, with an air of mingled bonhomie and finesse. "Oh! I know what an elder sister is," she added, as Nathalie smiled in reply. "When your aunt died in Provence, and you must have been very young then, for indeed you are a child still," — Nathalie looked a little indignant, —



"our good sister Rose took the little orphan, and became to her more like a second mother than like a strange sister; only I cannot understand why she let her be at that sour Mademoiselle Dantin's?"

"Because Rose is a dependant, like myself," replied Nathalie, "and resided with an aunt far more sour than Mademoiselle Dantin; all she could do was to find me in her school a situation I was glad to get."

"Depend upon it, Petite, your sister acted for the best; yes, your sister Rose is your friend," she emphatically added.

"She is, indeed; and though she so often finds fault with me, I never can feel angry."

"What does she say then?"

"That I am proud, rebellious, and resentful; that I love impossibilities and disdain the real."

"Your sister is a little severe," said the Canoness, giving Nathalie a puzzled look, "but though she of course means well, all this is not quite correct, is it?"

"Indeed it is," frankly replied Nathalie; "but then Rose has a right to be severe; she is nearly perfect herself."

"It is quite proper you should think so," decisively said the Canoness; "but for my part, I do not doat on perfect people. I know a person of that sort, one who seldom or ever does wrong; but for all that you cannot love that person. That person, my dear, never scolds, never gets into a passion, never says a cross word, but just acts in a quiet, underhand sort of way that is perfectly chilling. You never know how you are getting on with that person; by which I do not mean to say that person is deceitful. No, but that

person is just like a looking-glass; look in front as long as you like, it is all very well; but attempt to turn round, to peep behind, you see — nothing. You must not imagine, my dear," added the Canoness, after a brief pause, and looking at Nathalie very fixedly, "that I am talking of any one in this house, — no," she shrewdly observed, "that person is far away." This assertion was uttered quite triumphantly.

"That person must be very remarkable," thoughtfully said Nathalie attentively looking at Aunt Radegonde as she spoke.

"Remarkable! well no, not a first sight, at least; and yet that person is no common individual."

"You said perfect," quickly rejoined Nathalie.

"Well, perfect was perhaps too strong a word. Yet it is difficult to find fault with that person: and a person who in spite of all you can say manages to be always in the right is very nearly perfect. Only it is a provoking sort of perfection; I do not like it," very emphatically added Aunt Radegonde; "do you?"

"Not at all," replied Nathalie quite as heartily.

Here the voice of Madame Marceau was heard on the landing, talking to one of the servants.

Aunt Radegonde looked alarmed, bent down and exclaimed in a hurried whisper: —

"My dear child, do not let Madame Marceau know I spoke to you about that person."

"Is Madame Marceau that person?" rapidly thought Nathalie, as the lady entered the room; but the aspect of the ruffled brow, and the sound of the sharp irritated voice as she recorded the delinquency of some servant, did not give the idea of one who never spoke a cross word, or never scolded.

"Really," she said with anything but a bland voice, "servants do not seem to appreciate the privilege of living in a family like this; they will not obey."

"When we had but one servant —" began Aunt Radegonde.

"The dismissal of André has produced no effect," quickly interrupted her niece.

"André! Do you say André is dismissed?"

Madame Marceau majestically seated herself and sententiously replied in answer to the eager look and inquiry of her aunt, "that André was dismissed."

"Why, so?" asked the Canoness looking much chagrined; "he is so honest and industrious."

"Very true, aunt, but we require obedience in our servants."

"What order has he neglected? I am sure the poor fellow will only be too glad to repair his fault."

"We are not in the habit of entering into explanations with our servants," replied her dignified niece.

"But what has he done, Rosalie?"

Madame Marceau looked mysterious.

"Ay, there it is!" ironically exclaimed Aunt Radegonde, rocking herself in her chair; "the man is sent away, he does not know why, — I do not know why, — do not believe you know why, — nobody knows, in short. You call that will, I call it tyranny. You may tell any one I said so if you like; if others are afraid, I warn any one who likes to hear, that I am not."

She spoke loudly and looked defiant.

"Aunt," patronisingly said her niece, "you surely ought to be accustomed to the manifestations of our

family peculiarity — *will*, though you do not possess so much of it."

"I have as much will as any one," sharply interrupted the Canoness.

"Be it so," replied Madame Marceau, with a gracious smile and an Olympic inclination of the head, "be it so, dear aunt; but as I was saying, you ought to be accustomed to the manifestations of our family peculiarity — *will*. You know my impartiality; I do not justify this inexorable will; — I deplore it. But such we are, and all I can say is, I feel truly sorry for those who unfortunately suffer from this peculiarity."

A daughter of the Atridæ could not have lamented with more solemn dignity the melancholy fatality attending her race.

"I tell you," testily rejoined Aunt Radegonde, "it is not will, but the despotism and caprice I know of old. — There!" With this last bold defiance she resumed her knitting.

"My good aunt," replied Madame Marceau, becoming more polite and more cool, "excuse me: energy is not despotism; justice is not caprice. These qualities have restored our family to its pristine splendour; — they will keep it there. We may regret that those inflexible virtues should interfere with the happiness of any person, howsoever humble that person may be; we may also regret to be misunderstood, by our own relatives especially, but we really cannot help it."

"I never meant —" began Aunt Radegonde, looking hurried.

"Pray, do not mention it; it is quite immaterial," kindly interrupted Madame Marceau. And having thus put down her aunt she turned towards Nathalie, asked

how she had liked the garden; was sure she would like the grounds; informed her that the domain of Sainville was much admired, and hoped to have many pleasant walks over it with Mademoiselle Montolieu. The Canoness joined in the hope, and looked at her niece, who looked at the wall. But Aunt Radegonde, who seemed anxious to be restored to favour, persisted.

"Yes," she said, "we shall have many pleasant walks, all three, or rather all four together; for Armand will accompany us, and he talks so well! Ah! Petite, you should hear him and his sister, sometimes!"

"My brother is indeed a man of varied acquirements," condescended to observe Madame Marceau, without, however, looking at her aunt. "I regret that he should be gone to Marmont; but he is to be home at five. I have no doubt he will be greatly pleased to become acquainted with Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"How long is this to last?" impatiently thought Nathalie, who began to feel heartily wearied of Madame Marceau's protecting grandeur and strained courtesy.

It lasted the whole day, which appeared to the young girl one of the longest she had ever spent. Madame Marceau was not one of those talkers who tire out by their inexhaustible volubility; her language was not trite, common-place, or ridiculous; but she had a way of spreading out her wealth, her state, her lineage, as if these were to be worn at full length, like the robe and ample train of her grandmother. The little she said — for she did not speak much — was all on the theme, more implied, however, than

expressed, of her greatness. If Nathalie looked out of the window and admired the fine avenue of trees leading to the château, she was told of how many centuries was their growth, and by which of the Sainvilles they had been planted; if she glanced at a picture, she was informed how long it had been in the family, or if it was a portrait, which of the Sainvilles it represented. In short, the past and present glory of the Sainville race evidently reigned supreme in the lady's thought. Aunt Radegonde knitted assiduously and spoke very little. She did indeed let out one or two indiscreet observations, but a look, and a "dear aunt," from her niece silenced her effectually.

"What a cheerless day!" she observed towards evening, and she laid down her knitting with a slight yawn.

"Very cheerless indeed," said Nathalie; and glad of some excuse to leave her seat, she rose and went up to one of the large and deep windows that looked on the avenue.

It had been raining all the afternoon and it was raining still. The sky was dark, dreary, and obscured by gloomy clouds that chased each other rapidly along. Gusts of wind bowed the tall trees of the avenue, and the winding road and landscape beyond it could be seen only through the torrents of slanting rain.

"What dreadful weather Armand has for his ride home," observed Madame Marceau, in a tone of concern.

"Perhaps he will not come," said the Canoness.

"My dear aunt," replied her niece, in her sententious way, "we never break a promise; Armand left word that he would be home at five, and at five we must expect him. As for the weather, he has been so

great a traveller that I really think he feels indifferent to it."

No more was said until the clock struck five.

"That is strange!" said Madame Marceau with stately surprise.

"*Chère Petite*," observed Aunt Radegonde turning towards Nathalie, "you will take cold near that window."

"I am only looking at the clouds," carelessly replied Nathalie; "they run along the sky so fast that they look like living things."

She lingered a while longer near the window, before resuming her seat by the Canoness.

"Oh! there comes Monsieur de Sainville," said Madame Marceau as the clatter of a horse's hoofs was heard in the avenue below. She looked at the clock impatiently, and when a few minutes had elapsed, left the room. There was a brief silence.

"You will spoil your sight with that embroidery; there is no light," at length observed the Canoness, addressing Nathalie, whose glance seemed rivetted to her work.

"Thank you, I am used to it," she replied in a low and somewhat flurried tone. A step was heard on the staircase; she laid down her work on her lap, then took it up again nervously.

The door opened and Madame Marceau entered alone. Her brow seemed slightly overcast.

"*Mademoiselle Montolieu*," said she, addressing the young girl in a tone which sounded sharp and irritated, through all its softness and courtesy, "my brother is very anxious to see you. Would you mind accompanying me to the library."

Nathalie rose in some trepidation.

"Where are you taking her?" asked the Canoness.

"Armand wishes to speak to Mademoiselle Montolieu."

"What does he want with her?" pettishly inquired Aunt Radegonde.

"My brother, Monsieur de Sainville, wishes to speak to Mademoiselle Montolieu, his guest," replied Madame Marceau, drawing Nathalie's arm within her own, and speaking with one of her grand airs.

"He could speak to her here," returned the Canoness, who could be pertinacious enough when she chose; "and I do not see why he will have her in the library — unless it be to scare her, as he scares every one," she added, under her breath.

Madame Marceau gave her aunt a look, which made the little Canoness fidget in her chair.

"Really, dear aunt," said she with an affected gaiety, that was intended to conceal a good deal of irritation, "one might think I was leading our young friend to the *antre* of some ogre. Fortunately," she added, with a keen look at Nathalie, "Mademoiselle Montolieu does not share your apprehensions."

The Canoness looked corrected and penitent, and did not venture to breathe another syllable, as the two ladies left the room.

"I suppose," thought Nathalie, as they silently proceeded towards the library, "that Monsieur de Sainville is a second edition of his sister, — a tall, fine man, very stately, very courteous, and very patronizing."

She glanced at her companion as she came to this conclusion, and the lowering expression of Madame Marceau's brow led her to believe that this interview was little to the lady's taste.



The library was situated on the ground-floor, and the entrance to it faced the door leading to the dining-room. It was soon reached; and as Madame Marceau's hand rested on the bronze door-handle, Nathalie felt the mingled shyness and curiosity of her years blending with a disagreeable feeling of uneasiness, caused by the prospect of meeting one of whom, whether rightfully or not, she had not been led to conceive a very favourable opinion. Her companion smiled, and gave her an encouraging look.

"Pray, Mademoiselle Montolieu," said she, in a low and emphatic tone, "do not feel any uneasiness. We are your friends; we mean you well."

She pressed her hand, and opened the door as she spoke.

The library was a wide apartment very simply furnished, with shelves of books, busts, and a few pictures. A vase filled with choice flowers stood on a large table covered with papers; near it burned a lamp with a clear, cheerful light. A large glass door revealed the garden beyond, with its distant trees now bending before the autumn blast; in the dark sky above already shone a pale and watery moon, ever and anon obscured by passing clouds. The dreary aspect of nature heightened the air of warmth and comfort of everything within.

As the two ladies entered, a gentleman, who was standing near the fire-place, turned round and advanced to receive them. Madame Marceau walked up to him, leading Nathalie by the hand, and addressing him as her "dear Armand," introduced her companion to him, with great stateliness. She then caused Nathalie to be seated, stood by her chair, uttering in her

smooth tones a few common-place remarks, framed a plausible excuse, and retired, leaving the young girl alone with her brother.

"This is very childish," thought Nathalie, as she felt her heart beating rapidly and her cheeks gradually covering over with a crimson flush; and she found her emotion the more inexcusable that a look had told her there was nothing so singular in Monsieur de Sainville's appearance as to excite feelings of uneasiness or alarm.

The master of Sainville did not in the least fulfil the idea which, from the distant glimpses she had formerly obtained of him, and still more from her own recent conjectures, the young girl had formed of his appearance. She had thought to find a tall, dark man, sallow, harsh-featured, rather handsome, but of a severe, forbidding aspect, and long past middle age. But as he stood by the table, near which she sat, eyeing her with a quiet yet penetrating glance, speaking in a rich, harmonious voice, which seemed the gift of the family, and addressing her with that indescribable French ease which in his case was united to great simplicity of manner, she was compelled to confess that nothing could be more different from what she had anticipated or imagined, — nothing especially more opposed to the showy but unpleasing Madame Marceau.

Monsieur de Sainville was not much above the usual height, and of a spare figure, in which there was nothing to strike the eye. Still less did his countenance seem likely to attract attention; it was neither plain nor handsome; Nathalie was surprised at seeing only a serious face, intellectual indeed, but pale and

mild, and still further softened by hair of a light chestnut, and a slight moustache of the same hue. Without being young, he was still in the prime and vigour of life, and evidently much younger than his sister.

"And is this Monsieur de Sainville?" thought Nathalie, looking at him again with inward disappointment. Yet this second glance, though it beheld no more than the first, impressed her very differently.

There was something in the settled pallor of the features, in the breadth and calmness of the brow, in the clear glance of the dark blue eyes, in the decisive arch of the nose, in the firmly-compressed lips and curved chin, and above all, in the well-defined though not harsh outlines of the whole countenance, which no longer gave Nathalie the idea of gentleness. The mild expression which had first struck her, now resembled more a settled and unruffled calm, the result, perhaps, of a disposition serene by nature, and not easily disturbed by outward events, or, as she felt more inclined to think, the only external sign of a strong and silent will at rest. The whole face forcibly reminded her of a medallion of Bonaparte in her possession; not in beauty, for Monsieur de Sainville was by no means handsome; not in the cast of the features, for his were essentially northern; but in innate power and marble-like repose. Indeed that countenance, which had at first seemed so quiet in character, now looked to Nathalie fraught with meaning, but with a meaning she vainly sought to read. She looked and felt baffled; like one who beholds an inscription engraved in unknown characters on a stone tablet; it is there visible, indeed, to the eye, but inscrutable to thought, and though seen, not the less a mystery.

Whilst these thoughts passed rapidly through the young girl's mind, her host continued to address her; he was regretting, in courteous speech, the business which had prevented him from meeting her sooner. To her surprise, he was quite aware of her parentage, and mentioned her father, whom he remembered, in terms of respect and esteem, that gratified her deeply. Indeed he seemed bent on placing her at her ease. When he had succeeded in dispelling her first embarrassment, he gradually dropped into a more business-like manner, polite still, but which, as Nathalie felt, was destined to lead them to the real object of this interview.

"Apologies are weak," said he, addressing her with grave earnestness, "yet I must apologise — I must express my deep regret for what has happened. Until yesterday evening I little suspected that you had been subjected to annoyance from a member of my family; I should still be as ignorant, had I not met my nephew, as he left Mademoiselle Dantin's garden. To Madame Marceau, his mother, and my sister, I entrusted, as was most fitting, the task of relieving you from an unpleasant and unmerited position. I know this is a delicate subject — perhaps I ought to leave it wholly to Madame Marceau; but I have a principle, from which I do not lightly swerve, always to do that myself which I can really do. If I allude, however, to these circumstances, it is, in the first place, to assure you of my sorrow at the disagreeable consequences of my nephew's imprudence; in the second, to hope that you will be so good as to consider this house your home, until a more eligible one offers for your acceptance."

He spoke in a brief, business-like tone, yet with a quiet simplicity, evidently meant to dispel every sense of obligation. Nathalie did not the less feel bound to thank him; he quickly interrupted her.

"Nay," said he, politely still, but quite decisively, "so common-place an act of duty requires no acknowledgments."

Nathalie made no reply. A short embarrassed pause succeeded. Monsieur de Sainville seemed to wish to say something more, yet he remained silent; he left his place, returned to it again, but did not speak. Nathalie felt intuitively that he was looking at her. She glanced up — it was so; but though his look was both fixed and thoughtful, it caused her no embarrassment: this protracted silence became, however, somewhat awkward.

"I fear, Sir," said she, half rising from her seat, "that I am intruding on your leisure."

"No, no," he quickly replied. "To tell you the truth," he added, more leisurely, "our conversation is not yet ended."

Nathalie felt and looked uneasy.

"Some matters," he resumed, in his business-like way, "require frankness; it is then — as, indeed, it almost always is—the most honourable, the most easy course to pursue. I should not have troubled you to come here, Mademoiselle Montolieu, since I could have had the pleasure of seeing you in the presence of my aunt and sister, had I not felt myself bound to communicate to you certain facts which you probably do not know, but which you certainly ought to know. But first I must assure you that over my nephew and his feelings I claim not the least authority. You will there-

fore understand that, so far as he is concerned, I do not seek, I do not wish to interfere. Nor do I presume to inquire into your private feelings; I only feel that you are my guest, that it is my duty not to allow you to be deceived, even indirectly. All I wish to state is, that my sister has for some time planned a marriage between her son and a friend of hers, Mademoiselle de Jussac; that after agreeing, he has now refused to marry that lady, and that his mother has declared she will never give her consent — with which the law will not yet allow him to dispense — to his marriage with any other woman. She is determined not to yield, and so is he, for they are much alike in person and in temper; if he has, therefore, deceived himself, so far as to state the contrary to you, believe me he is wholly mistaken. My perfect knowledge of this, the advantage I have over you in years and experience, my position as your host, entitle me, perhaps, to consider myself as standing towards you, for some time at least, in the relation of guardian and friend. I have therefore entered into these explanations, in order that you may know how to guide your actions. You can now weigh the exact cost of what, at your age, is called the happiness of life, of what is often only the dream of a day. You will have time to discriminate the caprice of youth from its sincere feeling. If you doubt, you can easily look on the past as null; if your faith is strong, you can wait, and refuse to let any authority, any human being stand between your feelings and you."

He ceased. Nathalie had heard him in profound silence. Reclining back in her chair, with her hands clasped on her knees, and her eyes fastened on the

floor, she had remained as motionless as a statue. But her colour, which came and went, and the irrepressible working of her features, showed that this calmness was only apparent. Yet when she looked up, and met Monsieur de Sainville's eye with a glance as clear and steady, though not so calm as his own, and when, after a brief pause, she answered him, there was in her whole bearing a composure and feminine dignity she seldom displayed, and which were perhaps drawn forth by the presence of a stranger, not of her own sex, perhaps also by the quiet, business-like manner in which she had been addressed.

"Sir," said she, calmly, "you mean well, — kindly, I should say, and I thank you sincerely; but allow me to observe, that this advice, however excellent — that these explanations, however clear, — were both unnecessary in my case. That Madame Marceau should wish to marry her son to a lady, and that he should refuse to marry that lady, are family matters of no moment to me."

Her colour deepened, and her eyes kindled with rising pride, as she concluded. Monsieur de Sainville gave her a look as searching as it was brief.

"Indeed," said he, slowly; "then I confess I no longer understand in what relation you stand towards my nephew."

"In none whatever," she replied, with laconic haughtiness. "Monsieur Marceau's attentions were never encouraged by me; yet he presumed so far as to write to me, asking for a favourable reply."

"Did you give him any reply?" quietly asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"No! Sir," sharply answered Nathalie; "but de-

sirous, I suppose, of exacting an answer, Monsieur Marceau found means of entering the garden of the school. I was requesting him to retire, when Mademoiselle Dantin came up."

Monsieur de Sainville's calm countenance assumed a peculiar expression: it was not anger, nor yet scorn, but something between both. It lasted for a moment only; it had vanished when he raised his look towards Nathalie, and said, somewhat briefly:

"And this was all."

He spoke more as if announcing a fact than as if putting a question. But Nathalie felt that her silence might be construed into assent; she hesitated, and looked embarrassed, conscious of his fixed and scrutinizing gaze.

"Sir," she said at length, "I do not wish to leave you under a false impression: in one sense this is not all, for I met Monsieur Marceau in the garden of this house, this morning, by chance."

"By chance!" incredulously echoed Monsieur de Sainville.

"By chance on my part, at least," she warmly replied.

Monsieur de Sainville eyed her quietly, whilst a subdued smile, which annoyed Nathalie more than his supposed insinuation, played for a moment around his severe mouth.

"I assure you," said he, "that I never meant to hint anything likely to wound your delicacy; but that this meeting was accidental I cannot believe. I regret that even here you should not have been free from annoyance. I shall see," he added, with a slight frown, "that it occurs not again."



"I believe," observed Nathalie, with some hesitation, "that Monsieur Marceau wished to apologize."

Monsieur de Sainville smiled again.

"Permit me to doubt," said he, quietly, "that your acceptance of an apology was the only result he hoped from this interview."

"Which had no other result, Sir," rejoined Nathalie, in a quick, nettled tone.

"Nor did I imply that it had," he calmly answered.

Still Nathalie felt anxious to explain.

"It had not even that result, having lasted only a few minutes. Indeed, Monsieur Marceau left me in a fit of pique, because," she added, colouring, as she felt this explanation had been unsolicited, and was perhaps unneeded, "because, in short, I did not sympathize with that which I really could not understand."

Monsieur de Sainville stroked his chin, and looked down.

"I regret," said he, after a pause, "having laboured under an impression which has evidently been disagreeable to you; but the truth is, I plainly understood that the only obstacle to my nephew's attachment rested with his mother."

Indignant amazement kept Nathalie silent for a few seconds, during which her colour deepened, until it covered her features with a burning glow.

"He said so — he dared to say so!" she passionately exclaimed; but tears of anger and shame rose to her eyes, her lips trembled, and she could say no more.

Monsieur de Sainville waited for several minutes,

during which he allowed Nathalie's excitement to subside, and watched her attentively.

"I should regret this frankness," he said at length, "did I not feel you have a right to know the truth."

He spoke with emphasis. Nathalie turned towards him, looking as she felt, — touched and grateful.

"You have been kind, Sir," said she, with that spontaneousness which is so well expressed by the untranslatable French word *effusion*, "very kind; I thank you truly."

"Are you quite sure of that?" said he, eyeing her composedly, "because," he continued, answering her quick, startled look, "your countenance is more frank than you imagine; its meaning, if I read it rightly a while ago, was that the spirit of my observations was far from being acceptable to you. Now I assure you that I was not actuated by the indiscreet wish of ascertaining anything you might think fit to conceal, but by the simple desire of doing you justice; for, indeed," he continued, after a brief pause, "I may say that the manner in which you listened to the explanations I then thought myself justified in offering, had already convinced me of that which your words have confirmed; namely, that my nephew had mistaken his own hopes for your acquiescence."

There was something in this speech that jarred on Nathalie's ear. She fancied, in her sensitive pride, that Monsieur de Sainville was too much pleased at there being no tie between his nephew and herself. Desirous of showing him that she was quite as ready and anxious as he could be to repudiate the idea, she said, somewhat proudly:

"May I ask, Sir, if Madame Marceau labours under this impression?"

"It shall be my care to undeceive her," he briefly replied.

"But, Sir," continued Nathalie, "I begin to feel doubts as to the propriety of accepting even your kind offer."

"Why so?" he composedly inquired.

"I feel as if my presence here could scarcely be agreeable."

"And pray how can this be?" he asked, with a smile.

"Madame Marceau will perhaps be reminded — I mean to say — indeed, I should not like to be the cause —"

She stopped short, bit her lip, and looked vexed at having begun that which it was not quite easy for her to conclude.

There was a pause, for Monsieur de Sainville took his time to observe, with that smile, half kindly, half ironical, which had already annoyed the young girl:

"I believe you allude to my nephew; but he is now precisely where it is best for him to be — in Paris, prosecuting his legal studies. If he is wise, he will remain there."

Still Nathalie seemed willing to raise some objection. Monsieur de Sainville anticipated her.

"Believe me," said he, gravely, "it shall be my care that nothing or no one annoys you under this roof."

He said not in plain speech "this is my house, and you are my guest;" but his look and manner implied

it; and Nathalie felt a strange mixture of pleasure and embarrassment to think that it was so. She felt that there was kindness in that calm face, which now looked down upon her, a kindness she knew not how to acknowledge.

She was little aware that there was no need of acknowledgment; that the most finished and graceful thanks would not have been so expressive as the look, half shy, half confident, which she now turned towards Monsieur de Sainville; for the charm of the ingenuous embarrassment of youth is seldom lost on those of maturer years, nor did it seem to be lost on him, as he eyed the young girl with a sedate, thoughtful glance; and though he did not smile now, his grave features were softened and relaxed. Nathalie felt intuitively that the interview had lasted long enough, and she rose from her seat.

"I am sure, Sir, that you are very kind," said she, hesitatingly, and colouring at the earnest tone, as well as at the homeliness of the compliment; "and I feel truly grateful," she added, after a pause.

Perhaps as she said this, her manner became constrained, or it may be that the last word broke the charm; for as it was uttered, Monsieur de Sainville's countenance suddenly altered back to the old expression.

"Pray let there be no undue sense of obligation," said he, with his cold politeness; and, perceiving her wish to depart, he led her out of the room.

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## CHAPTER VII.

"So this is Monsieur de Sainville," thought Nathalie, as she closed the door of the library behind her and walked up stairs.

She felt disappointed; for there was nothing, as she had expected there would be, singular in her host. She also felt chilled and repelled. At first she thought this was because he had questioned her too closely. On reflection she perceived that he had put only one question to her; what she had said had been mentioned of her own accord. With haughty surprise she now asked herself why? Had his frankness been such as to win frankness in return? Nay, for he had told her exactly what he had wished to mention from the first; not one word more. He had laid facts before her, without comment, without advice, without giving her any clue to his own feelings. How he felt with regard to his nephew's conduct, how he would view an engagement between Charles Marceau and herself, were matters of which she was as ignorant now as before she entered the library. She had said much, but had learned nothing save that the providential interference of which Madame Marceau had so freely taken the merit, was in reality attributable to her brother, a gentleman serious in aspect, in manner calm, if not cold. She wondered if he was always so, and if this was all. The Canoness and her niece were both in the drawing-room, when she entered it, and both looked at her with evident curiosity. She silently sat down by the arm-chair of the elder lady.

"You see, aunt," observed Madame Marceau, with an assumed gaiety, that did not in Nathalie's opinion,

become her quite so well as the airs *de grande dame* she so often took; "you see that Mademoiselle Montolieu has come back to us safe and not looking scared."

"Oh! no; not yet," shortly answered the Canoness.

"Which implies that she will be so one day. What is Mademoiselle Montolieu's own opinion?"

She bent an inquiring glance on the young girl as she spoke; but Nathalie was not inexpert in the little feminine manœuvre of eluding a question: she replied, with a smile: "Mademoiselle Dantin never could scare me, Madame, from which I conclude I am invulnerable."

No more was said on the subject.

When dinner-time came, it was Nathalie who helped the Canoness down stairs: for though she never confessed it, Aunt Radegonde was somewhat infirm.

Monsieur de Sainville was already in the dining-room; he had not seen his aunt that day, and as she entered leaning on Nathalie's arm, he came up to her and kissed the little hand still white and delicate, which she extended towards him; she received this courtesy with cool dignity, merely observing:

"You had bad weather for your ride home, Armand."

"It was rather wet," he coolly replied.

"Rather wet!" thought Nathalie who could hear the rain still pouring down in torrents.

"And a little windy," he added as a keen blast rushed up the avenue and swept round the old château, dying away with a moaning sound.

"I wonder what he considers really wet and windy weather," inwardly pursued Nathalie, who had all the asperity of a chilly southern against the dreary north.

"But it was not too wet for poor André to go," dryly observed Aunt Radegonde, as her nephew led her to the table.

"Oh! he is gone then!" said he quietly.

"Yes, and I think it a great pity," she observed, drawing herself up very decisively.

Monsieur de Sainville made no reply.

"A great pity for his family," said the Canoness, with slight hesitation. "Did you speak, Armand?" she added after a pause.

"No aunt, but I agree with you: it is a pity."

"He is hard," thought Nathalie, half indignantly.

The meal was formal and silent. Monsieur de Sainville spoke little; Madame Marceau seemed enveloped in her own dignity; the Canoness was mute. But when dessert was brought up and the servants had retired, she turned towards her nephew, near whom she sat, suddenly observing:

"Armand, why did you dismiss that poor André?"

"For neglect of my orders, aunt."

"Because, you see," she continued in a half apologetic tone, as if willing to explain her abrupt inquiry, "I know the man to be so sober, honest, and industrious; at least I think so," she added, gradually shrinking, like many an advocate, from the cause of her protégé.

"You are quite right, aunt," quietly said Monsieur de Sainville, "André is all that."

"Then, why dismiss him?" asked the Canoness once more, quite confident.

"For neglect of my orders, aunt," he answered, exactly in the same tone as before.

"I understand," sagaciously said Aunt Radegonde, "it was something very important."

"Only a tree he neglected to fell," carelessly replied her nephew.

"You dismiss him for that!"

"Not for the order neglected, aunt, but for having neglected the order."

"Why not tell him again?"

"Because I never keep servants to whom I must repeat the same order twice. I waited three days to see whether he would or not, do as I had told him, and waited uselessly. I paid him about double what I owed him to get rid of him at once. He will easily find another situation: I have done him no wrong."

"Ay," said Radegonde in a low tone, "that is how people have servants who never love them, Armand."

Monsieur de Sainville, was reclining back in his chair with folded arms. He looked down at his aunt and smiled a little ironically.

"Aunt," said he, "we pay servants to serve, and not to love us; and they serve us not for love, but for wages. There is no obligation on either side; it is a contract, a bargain — no more. As for explanations between master and servant, they will not do: the servant would only learn to argue, a right he has given up, instead of obeying; the master in speaking to the hireling, would forget the man; in short, we should have the contemptible and odious characters of rebel and tyrant face to face; one of which characters seldom exists indeed, unless in presence of the other."

"Come," thought Nathalie, "a few more such conversations, and I think I shall begin to understand you."



But as she looked up, she met the keen look of Monsieur de Sainville, opposite whom she sat. She remembered what he had told her, concerning the frankness of her face, and with some trepidation, she resolved to be more on her guard for the future.

Madame Marceau now opened her lips in sententious speech.

"Authority, my dear aunt," said she, addressing the Canoness, "cannot be thus cast away. The power to rule is the test of mind. But few, very few," she emphatically added, "possess that lofty power."

No one replied; dinner was over. Monsieur de Sainville retired to the library; the ladies went up to the drawing-room.

Seated on her low seat, for the place by Aunt Radegonde now seemed hers, with her work lying neglected on her lap, her look fastened on the burning embers, Nathalie was lulled into a reverie, by the mingled sound of wind and rain. She was soon roused by the Canoness, who asked whether she played or sang, and eagerly requested her to sing something, when with a smile she replied that she could do both. Madame Marceau declared she would be charmed to hear her; she spoke as if Nathalie could neither touch the instrument, nor open her lips, without her majestic encouragement.

Nathalie rose, and silently seated herself before the piano; her fingers wandered awhile over the keys, as she played the prelude to a gay romance: but something in the murmurs of this chill evening awoke the memory of old times; the strain changed suddenly, and she sang an old sailor's hymn to the Virgin, which she had often heard, and sung in her

native province. The human voice is the most spiritual expression of music, that poetry of sense, and never does it rise so much above what is earthly, as when giving utterance to religious melody: the voice of Nathalie, was not of the highest quality or extent, but it was clear, flexible, and expressive; especially on this evening, when the memory of early youth, and home, was with her as she sang. Aunt Radegonde was all attention, with her head thoughtfully inclined on one side, and her knitting at rest,

"Well," said she, when the strain had ceased, "I should not have thought you sang religious music."

"What sort of music did you think then I sang?" promptly asked Nathalie.

"Something like yourself, — pretty and gay."

"And frivolous," added Nathalie in a nettled tone. She looked up as she spoke from the instrument, and in the large mirror behind it, she perceived the figure of Monsieur de Sainville, whose entrance she had not heard. He was standing near his aunt, and appeared to have been listening.

"Pray sing us something else," said the Canoness.

"We shall be happy to hear Mademoiselle Montolieu again," observed Madame Marceau, with stately grace.

Nathalie hesitated. She wondered whether Monsieur de Sainville was a judge of music, and whether he would join his entreaties to those of his aunt and sister; but he remained silent, and to all appearance uninterested. After some more hesitation, the young girl complied with Aunt Radegonde's request; she sang an Italian piece, and though her voice was at first slightly tremulous, she felt that she sang it well.

"My dear child," emphatically said the Canoness, "you are a little prodigy."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu sings charmingly," observed Madame Marceau.

Her brother said nothing, and as Nathalie left the instrument to resume her seat, he began to walk slowly up and down the room; an exercise that appeared to be customary to him.

To all appearance the young girl was absorbed by her work, but in truth her thoughts were very differently engaged. She felt extremely nettled, in spite of herself, at her host's indifference.

"How morose he must be, not to like music," she thought, without acknowledging to herself, that it was his want of admiration for her music, that vexed her; "and Italian music too! But how indeed could it touch a northern icicle like him?"

Monsieur de Sainville stopped short as she came to this indignant conclusion, with a sort of coincidence to her thought that somewhat startled her; he said briefly:

"Do you not come from the south, Mademoiselle Montolieu?"

Nathalie assented.

"I thought so. I was once on the Mediterranean in a storm, and all the sailors sang that hymn you sang just now. I had never heard it since then."

He walked up to the end of the room, and as he came back once more, he again addressed her:

"May I inquire from what part of the south you come?"

"From Arles, in Provence."

"Arles!" said the Canoness, catching the word;

"Arles," she repeated. "Chère Petite, what is Arles so very celebrated for?"

Nathalie knew, but did not care to say.

"Antiquities, I believe," observed Madame Marceau.

"No, it is not antiquities," decisively said the Canoness; "Petite, you smile, I am sure you know."

"We have so many good things at Arles," replied Nathalie, colouring as she caught Monsieur de Sainville's look eyeing her keenly; "excellent ham, for instance."

"Petite, I am sure it is not ham."

"Arles is celebrated for the beauty of its women," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville; "they are held to be beyond doubt the handsomest women of France."

He had paused for a moment, and resumed his walk as he concluded.

"There," cried the Canoness, with great triumph, "I knew Arles was celebrated for something remarkable. Armand, do tell us what these handsome women are like."

She looked shrewdly at Nathalie, who, conscious perhaps that she was no unfair specimen of Arlesian beauty, blushed deeply and bent over her work. But there was no need to blush.

"Beauty must be seen and felt, — not described," coldly said Monsieur de Sainville.

Aunt Radegonde looked disappointed; Nathalie felt slighted, and thought her host a very disagreeable man; Madame Marceau, sitting in lonely majesty on a couch facing her, allowed her lip to curl with a haughty smile. Of all this, Monsieur de Sainville

seemed to heed nothing. In passing by the table he had perceived and immediately taken up a card lying upon it. He read the name, and looked at his sister very fixedly. Nathalie had seen that card in the course of the day, and been struck to perceive that the name engraved upon it was that of Madame Marceau de Sainville, as if the owner repudiated, as much as in her power lay, the plebeian alliance, and, despite of custom, claimed back the patrician name of her birth. She now watched her brother with breathless, though stealthy, attention, as he stood with the card in his hand. He laid it down silently; she looked triumphant.

"Rosalie," he abruptly asked, "was not your husband related to the celebrated republican General Marceau?"

"There was a very distant relationship," replied she, much disturbed.

"I congratulate you," he briefly said; "our military annals hold not a name more stainless or more noble; for he, the champion of modern freedom, the man of to-day, had yet inherited the soul of the past, the spirit of truth and old chivalric honour. Years ago, passing by Coblenz, I saw the pyramid beneath which he then lay, not far from the spot where he fell in his glorious youth. Why have they removed him? Those are trophies we should ever leave to the soil of the foe." \*

\* Byron, who loved true heroism, has bestowed a noble eulogy on the memory of the heroic Marceau.

By Coblenz, on a rise of gentle ground,  
There is a small and simple pyramid,  
Crowning the summit of the verdant mound;  
Beneath its base are heroes' ashes hid,

As he spoke thus, a flush crossed his pale brow, and for a moment his calm look kindled.

There was an awkward attempt on the part of Madame Marceau to look interested and sympathetic, but in spite of all her efforts her brow was overcast, and Nathalie could see her biting her lip, like one striving in vain against some bitter disappointment. Her brother retired early, and she left soon after him.

As Nathalie was dressing herself on the following morning, she chanced to open the upper drawer of the ebony cabinet; scarcely had she done so when her eye fell on a letter lying within it. Her first impulse was to draw back, her next to return to the drawer, take up the letter, read the superscription, examine the seal, and, after keeping it some time in her hand, to replace it exactly where she had found it. She then closed the drawer, and without thinking of her unbraided hair, which fell down loosely on her shoulders, she stood motionless, with her eyes on the floor, her chin resting on the palm of her hand, — her whole attitude expressive of deep thought.

Our enemy's — but let that not forbid

Honour to Marceau! o'er whose early tomb  
Tears, big tears, gush'd from the rough soldier's lid,  
Lamenting and yet envying such a doom,  
Falling for France, whose rights he battled to resume.

Brief, brave, and glorious was his young career,  
His mourners were two hosts, his friends and foes;  
And fitly may the stranger, lingering here,  
Pray for his gallant spirit's bright repose;  
For he was freedom's champion, one of those,  
The few in number, who had not o'erstept  
The charter to chastise, which she bestows  
On such as wield her weapons; he had kept  
The whiteness of his soul, and thus men o'er him wept.

*Childe Harold*, st. 46, 47, Canto III.

This meditative mood was interrupted by the entrance of Amanda, who made her appearance with an apologetic curtsy and her usual inquisitorial look. "Madame had sent her to see whether she could not assist Mademoiselle in her toilet." Nathalie coldly declined.

But timidity was not one of Amanda's faults. "She felt convinced that she could do something with Mademoiselle's fine hair." She officiously brought a chair forward as she spoke; Nathalie looked displeased, but suddenly altering her mind, she seated herself. Amanda's white hands were immediately busy with her dark tresses.

"How delightful!" she enthusiastically exclaimed; "it is so long since I had such an opportunity of exercising my talents. Madame Marceau is the best of mistresses, but she will let me do nothing with her head; whereas Madame la Comtesse d'Onesson made me dress and undress her hair five or six times a-day. It was such good practice, and gave me such lightness of touch. Does Mademoiselle keep her pomatum in the upper drawer of that cabinet?"

"There is nothing in that upper drawer for which I have the least value," dryly replied Nathalie.

"Well, as I was saying," composedly resumed Amanda, "a woman without hair is like a man without a moustache, — nothing. Twice did that fatal point, the want of a moustache in the opposite party, prevent me from marrying very advantageously. Now, though Monsieur Charles is so handsome, — and having lived in the *fleur de pois* of the French noblesse, I ought to know something about handsome men, — he had not my approbation until he allowed his mous-

tache to grow; but, as I was saying, Madame's son is as good as he is handsome, and yet he has a fault; — yes, the greatest fault man can have."

She paused. Nathalie said nothing.

"No man can have a greater fault," decisively continued Amanda.

Still Nathalie remained silent.

"Well, as I was saying," resumed Amanda, who had always been saying something she wished to say; "it is incomprehensible; at his age, — at any age. I do not understand women-haters. Some would say he refuses to marry a charming lady, young, rich, and handsome, on account of some previous attachment, but those who have a little experience of the world know that previous attachments are not so strong as all that; there must be woman-hating in the case. Now, though other people may have been disappointed in love, and may feel bitter, and so forth, and never even look civilly at a woman, which they might do if they are too grand to talk, — though as to talking, people quite as grand have done it; now, as I say, that is no reason why young men, who cannot be supposed to have gone through the same disappointments, should take up those shocking principles, and act up to them, and make their mothers unhappy, and cause charming young ladies to be well-nigh broken-hearted, — all because they are women-haters! If there was, indeed, a previous attachment in the case, — will Mademoiselle look at herself now?" added Amanda, breaking off suddenly.

Nathalie rose, looked at herself in the glass, and frankly acknowledged Amanda's skill.



"You are a real artist," she said; "the back hair is brought forward in a most original manner."

"It is, — it is," enthusiastically cried Amanda, with a kindling glance; "Mademoiselle has the eye of a master. That *tour* is my own creation. 'Amanda,' said Madame la Comtesse d'Onesson to me, rising, one afternoon, 'I go, in three days, to the Russian Ambassador's ball; all Europe will be there. I must have something novel. Remember that I have spared your feelings; I have not appealed, even on urgent occasions, to the most illustrious professors; but, *entre nous*, my child, your style is monotonous; I fear you are worn out. Unless you produce some brilliant composition, I shall be compelled to consign you to the ordinary duties of the toilet, and submit to the vulgar prejudice which gives up the head of woman to the clumsy hands of man.' Let Mademoiselle imagine my feelings! I spent two days in the library, looking over books and engravings; but I could neither invent nor borrow. I went to bed in despair; — my reputation was lost. At length an inspiration came; I saw this admirable *tour*, rose and went to Madame's room. Though greatly fatigued from having danced all night, she rose with angelic sweetness. The effect was so admirable, that Madame embraced me, and presented me with this ring on the spot. Ah! if Mademoiselle would only be kind enough to accept of my services occasionally?"

"Provided you do not meddle with my upper drawer," quietly replied Nathalie.

Amanda smiled demurely. When Nathalie looked in the evening the letter had vanished. It was then on its way to Paris, inclosed in an ill-spelt but well

worded billet, addressed by Mademoiselle Amanda to Monsieur Charles, and in which that lady assured him Mademoiselle Montolieu's indifference was only too apparent. A little P. S. likewise informed Monsieur Charles that Mademoiselle Amanda, actuated by the most disinterested zeal in his cause, had undertaken to dress Mademoiselle Montolieu's hair, for the express purpose of disposing her heart more in favour of Monsieur Charles.

The morning passed quietly. Nathalie sate in the drawing-room with the Canoness and Madame Marceau; the former was voluble as usual; her niece looked unwell, and complained of a sharp pain in her side. Towards noon the sound of carriage-wheels was heard in the avenue. Nathalie detected the hasty look of annoyance Madame Marceau directed towards her.

"Who is it?" asked Aunt Radegonde.

"The De Jussacs, I suppose. Mademoiselle Montolieu, I hope you are not going to leave the room."

This was uttered in as faint a tone of entreaty as politeness permitted.

"Oh! no," coolly answered Nathalie, "but I feel too warm here."

She looked flushed as she rose and retired to one of the window-recesses. The visitors entered; the young girl's look was not once raised from her embroidery, but she felt, if she did not see, that Madame Marceau had placed herself so as to keep her in the shade. This was scarcely needed, for the long drape of the crimson curtains shrouded her completely from view. The drawing-room was large; Madame de Jussac and her daughters sate with their hostess at the other end of the apartment; their conversation

reached Nathalie in broken sentences; she cared not for it; she had laid by her work, her glance was bent on the avenue below, but she saw it not, for her pride, always watchful, was now roused and indignant. She looked round; no one heeded her; she left the apartment unperceived. The garden looked so warm and sunny from the landing window, that instead of going up to her own room, as she first thought to do, she went down stairs.

The symmetrical gardens loved in the olden time, though now so long out of fashion, have still a rare charm of their own. The airy marble balustrade and graceful stone vases filled with fresh flowers, the broad flight of stately steps, the smooth gravel walks, trim hedges, green grass-plots and variegated parterres, statues of fawns and laughing nymphs, and gay fountains sparkling in the sun, have all the cheerfulness and genial warmth of the pleasant south. Here there is verdure without damp, and spreading shade without treacherous mists or winding alleys of melancholy gloom. The whole aspect of the place is light, joyous and sunny; it speaks of azure skies, of shelter from the fervid sun of noon, and pleasant walks on the clear moonlight; of those days when lovely Italy from the greatest had become the most pleasant land in all Christendom; when gallant cavaliers and fair dames met for revel and pastime in every gay villa, and wiled the hours away with dance and song, or, resting 'neath the shade within the sound and freshness of falling waters, heard and told many a tale of love and old romance.

The pleasant aspect of the garden of Sainville on this autumn morning, the verdure of all around, the

blue serenity of the sky, the sunny warmth of the hour charmed Nathalie, whose mind had all the elasticity of her years. She had never seen a spot like this in Provence, and yet by a train of subtle associations it did remind her of Provence and of old familiar things. This was enough to soothe her ruffled mood; she lightly walked along the sunny path, — now loitering near a poor statue in its sequestered niche, where it had grown green with the gathered damp of many winters, — now looking at the fountain with its sparkling *jet d'eau*, — now pausing to admire a group of pale and bending china asters, or to watch a proud peacock perched on the top of a marble column rising in the centre of a grass-plot, and on which it stood like some enchanted bird of rare plumage until by approaching, the young girl broke the spell, and opening its wings it flew away with a discordant scream.

It was some time before Nathalie reached the end of the first terrace. She was descending one of the flights of steps that led to the second, when she heard the sound of a footstep in the gravel walk behind her. Without reflecting why she did so, she hastily stepped into the sanctuary of the sleeping nymph. The sound drew nearer; an erect figure descended the flight of steps; it was Monsieur de Sainville. A row of yews and evergreens screened Nathalie from observation; her dark dress could scarcely be discerned through the gloomy foliage of the trees near which she stood, but she could see whilst thus unseen, and she bent eagerly forward as Monsieur de Sainville passed close to her retreat. He looked exactly as on their first interview: calm, grave, and thoughtful. In stooping to see him better she made a slight noise; he paused and threw

a quick, penetrating look towards the spot where she stood: but the glance lasted only a second; his look was once more bent on the earth as with folded arms and thoughtful mien he passed on.


Nathalie breathed more freely. She had felt confident of being discovered, and had no wish for a lonely meeting with her severe-looking host. When after some time she left her retreat, she therefore entered the grounds instead of proceeding to the river side; but she was not fortunate, for the first path she took brought her in presence of Monsieur de Sainville, who was slowly walking along in the same direction. She looked shy and embarrassed; he greeted her with his calm and self-possessed courtesy.

"Do you like the recess where you were a while ago?" he suddenly asked after some desultory conversation.

"Yes, very much," hesitatingly answered Nathalie. "So he knew I was there," she thought, wondering whether he also knew she had been examining him so closely.

"Few like it," he continued; "indeed, it does not agree with the cheerful character of all around. The ivy and yews give the place a dark and melancholy aspect."

Nathalie did not answer, and Monsieur de Sainville spoke no more. They walked along in silence and soon reached a fine lime-tree avenue, which extended from one of the wings of the château into the grounds. As they entered it Nathalie felt relieved to perceive Madame Marceau and the Canoness seated on a wooden bench which stood within the cool shadow of



the largest tree. The younger lady eyed Nathalie with a sort of haughty surprise.

"My dear Armand," said she, addressing her brother with stately concern, "you have missed seeing Madame de Jussac and her daughters; did you not see the carriage?"

"I heard it," was the laconic reply.

"I assure you they were quite disappointed."

Monsieur de Sainville looked supremely indifferent.

"They are such charming girls," continued Madame Marceau; "perfect specimens of Norman beauty — Adèle especially."

She looked at Nathalie, but addressed her brother.

"Yes, she is good looking," he answered.

"Good looking!" repeated Madame Marceau, looking vexed; "I think she is by far the prettiest girl I have ever seen."

Monsieur de Sainville smiled one of his peculiar smiles.

"I have no wish," he coldly said; "to depreciate Mademoiselle de Jussac's attractions, of which, indeed, I am no fair judge, not happening to admire blue eyes or golden hair."

"But you admired them once, Armand," replied his sister, with a short irritated laugh.

Monsieur de Sainville eyed her for a moment with a sort of calm sternness that assorted well with the unmoved yet severe expression habitual to his countenance. Though the look lasted for a second only, Madame Marceau had not yet recovered from the evident trepidation into which it threw her, when her brother resumed, in his usual tone:

"Beauty is of little worth; Mademoiselle de Jussac possesses woman's greatest charm in a gentle, submissive disposition."

"And *that* is woman's greatest charm, is it?" thought Nathalie, a little nettled.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Madame Marceau, in a patronising tone, "why did you leave the drawing-room so precipitately? Are you timid?"

"Not at all, Madame," drily replied Nathalie; "nor gentle," she longed to add, as she detected a half smile on Monsieur de Sainville's countenance, but the temptation was prudently checked.

"Will you not sit down, Petite?" here observed the Canoness. "Amanda said she saw you going into the garden, and I caused this stool to be brought for you."

She spoke as if she felt the slight the young girl had received, and wished to atone for it. Nathalie silently seated herself by her side. Monsieur de Sainville declined his sister's offer of a seat on the bench.

"I prefer this," said he, walking up and down the avenue.

"I think you prefer anything to remaining quiet," impatiently thought Nathalie, whom this monotonous promenade annoyed considerably.

"Petite," continued the Canoness, seeing the conversation languish, "will you read us something from the last number of the *Revue*?"

Nathalie assented, and took the volume.

"What shall I read?" she asked. "Here is a tale entitled *Mystère*."

"Let us hear *Mystère*, by all means," said the Ca-

a great alacrity, "and mind you do not  
d on my account."

hesitated to begin; she was wondering  
was Monsieur de Sainville's intention to

are quite ready," majestically said Madame  
nodding to the young girl, who sate on her  
l, with the book on her lap, one hand keep-  
pen, whilst the other supported her inclined

thalie smiled a little disdainfully at finding her  
ion thus interpreted, but she complied, and

he story was mysterious enough in feeling, for in  
ent nothing could be more clear. It professed to  
te the fate and sorrows of a handsome and mo-  
t girl, madly in love with a profligate sharper, and  
ging to him still, in spite of his unworthiness.  
he only impropriety in the tale was in the sub-  
ct, but it annoyed Nathalie to be reading it aloud.  
When she came to the most impassioned passages,  
she skipped freely; likewise, whenever Monsieur de  
Sainville drew near, she read faster, and slightly lower-  
ed her voice, to raise it again when he had gone by.  
This she did several times. At length he suddenly  
paused in his walk, to say, in his cold, polite way:

"Pray, Mademoiselle, do not raise your voice on  
my account. I hear distinctly when I am farthest,  
and when you read in your lowest key."

Nathalie coloured, as she perceived her little femi-  
nine manœuvre thus detected. To add to her embar-  
rassment, Aunt Radegonde observed, with evident  
wonder:



"What a strange author, Petite; I never heard such abrupt transitions."

"Nor I," briefly said her nephew, in a tone that convinced Nathalie he knew very well by whose agency the abrupt transitions had been effected.

At length, and to her great satisfaction, the story concluded with an impassioned letter, of which she did not venture to omit one word, addressed by the tender-hearted heroine to her fascinating sharper.

"A romantic story, is it not, Mademoiselle Montolieu?" carelessly observed Madame Marceau, who had been half-reclining in an attitude of total indifference all the time.

"I think it unnatural, Madame," replied Nathalie, closing the book.

"Oh! you do? How so?"

Nathalie hesitated to reply. She felt that the under-current of Madame Marceau's bland manner was sharp and irritating. She looked unwell. Was it pain rendered her thus, or something relative to Monsieur de Sainville, or perhaps even to herself?

"How so?" again said Madame Marceau, as if determined to make her answer.

"Is it not unnatural, Madame," answered Nathalie, "that a woman, represented as pure and good, should care for that worthless man?"

"Oh! that is only romantic," answered Madame Marceau, with a cold smile; "and romantic girls are capable of any folly. Do not colour up so, my dear child; you are not at all romantic, I am sure. What struck me as most improbable," she sententiously added, "was, that two such persons, standing at the

extremities of the social scale, should meet. But, though you do not of course think so, novels are so false, Mademoiselle Montolieu. I know you will support me there, Armand," she added, turning towards her brother, who now stood near them; "you are no friend of romance."

Nathalie, who felt greatly offended at the unwarranted insinuations Madame Marceau chose to throw out, prepared herself to be still more offended at Monsieur de Sainville's reply.

"If by romance you mean the illusions of youth," he quietly answered, "it is not because I have outlived their day, that I quarrel with them."

Madame Marceau looked annoyed.

"My dear Armand," she exclaimed, with a short laugh, "I beg your pardon; I thought you were a professed sceptic."

"The character of sceptic," said he, very coldly, "is not one I respect, or to which I lay claim."

"Oh! then I have been mistaken all along," resumed his sister; "I thought — but no matter; — is there any harm, Armand, in asking you in what you still believe?"

"In two things, without which this world, evil as it is, would be much worse, — in God and honour."

He spoke gravely, and looked displeased.

"And in nothing else?" ironically inquired Madame Marceau.

Perhaps he did not hear her — perhaps he thought this catechising had been carried far enough; he did not, at least, reply; and Nathalie could see Aunt Radegonde looking uneasily at her niece.

"Well," resumed Madame Marceau, somewhat bitterly, "I suppose we agree on one point at least, Armand, — novels are unreal."

The slight shade of displeasure had completely passed away from Monsieur de Sainville's brow, when he replied —

"Their reality is not that of the every-day world, Rosalie, and why should it be? Their task is to deceive, — let them only deceive us well. When real novels are by chance written, who reads them? Youth lays them down with all the scorn of its fervent faith, and age, unless when grown cynical, has had enough of truth. Fictions are revelations not of truth, for they are most unreal, but of that which the soul longs to be true; they are mirrors not of actual human experience, but of human dreams and aspirations, of the eternal, though most unavailing desires of the heart."

"At that rate, that foolish *Mystère* was too real."

"Real," echoed Monsieur de Sainville, "I think, like *Mademoiselle Montolieu*, that it was a false, unnatural story. What pure woman could love that vulgar sharper? Either he is a better man, or she is a worse woman than we find here represented; either he, with all his vices, has something originally noble, or she, with all her seeming virtue, is corrupt at heart. There is no surer test of a woman's character than the man she prefers."

"I thought caprice was the great guide."

"Not if there is judgment."

"But if there is not judgment," pertinaciously resumed Madame Marceau.

"Then, of course, the character is imperfect and hopeless."

Nathalie thought that he spoke as if weary of the discussion.

"Yes, but where there is judgment," slowly and emphatically said Madame Marceau, "how calm, passionless, and almost godlike is the character; — with what magnificent indifference does it stand aloof, and survey everything external."

"Is this irony or flattery?" thought Nathalie, looking up, and wondering how Monsieur de Sainville would receive this speech, and the "calm, passionless, godlike," &c. He was standing near the bench on which his sister sat, but his unmoved countenance gave no clue to his feelings.

"Those minds are the minds," pursued Madame Marceau; "with them no undue feeling can exist, — reason reigns supreme."

"What has reason to reign over, if there is no undue feeling to subdue?" coldly asked her brother.

"Passionless characters are worthless in good or in evil: their gentleness is inability to feel anger; their virtue inability to do wrong. They know not how to hate, because they know not how to love. If there has been no temptation, there can be no merit; if there has been no struggle, there can be no victory."

Nathalie gave him a quick scrutinizing glance, but it was instantly detected by his look, and there was something in that cold and somewhat haughty gaze which completely baffled her scrutiny. She was more successful with Madame Marceau, who vainly endeavoured to look unconcerned.

"I am afraid you are not well, Rosalie," said her brother, addressing her in a low altered tone, after

eyeing her for a few moments, "a walk would do you good."

Madame Marceau hesitated, but at length rose, and accepted her brother's offer.

"Will you not accompany us over the grounds, Mademoiselle Montolieu?" he asked, turning towards Nathalie.

Madame Marceau looked haughty and displeased. Nathalie declined, under the plea of remaining with the Canoness.

"No," decisively said Aunt Radegonde, "you have not seen the grounds yet, and you must see them; but, before you go, you will perhaps arrange my shawl about me. Petite," she hurriedly whispered, as Nathalie rose, and wrapped her up in a vast shawl, "never refuse any little civility Armand may offer you; cold as he looks, he can be the best friend in the world. They are waiting; go."

"Why, what sort of a pasha is this host of mine, that so common-place an act of politeness is construed into a high favour," thought Nathalie, as she slowly followed Monsieur de Sainville and his sister. But his quiet, unassuming manner was by no means that of one who has conferred a favour. Nathalie had leisure to contrast it with that of Madame Marceau, who, as if anxious to impress the young girl with the fact, that she and her brother could agree as well as jar, now expatiated, in her lofty way, on divers subjects, all skilfully chosen, as Nathalie thought, so as to draw forth no contradiction. But this was not destined to be a fortunate day with Madame Marceau.

It was not long before they reached a part of the grounds where several men were engaged in clearing

away a group of trees, which had been found to injure, instead of improving the prospect. Several trees lay felled on the grass; a few dark yews and a sickly-looking poplar alone remained standing.

"The yews are to remain," said Monsieur de Sainville, addressing the chief of the workmen, who had approached to receive his orders; "but that poplar looks unsightly; I ordered André to fell it several days ago."

"Yes, Sir, but Monsieur Charles said it was to stay."

"What!" incredulously exclaimed Monsieur de Sainville.

"Monsieur Charles told him it was to stay, Sir," repeated the man, raising his voice.

There was a brief silence. Nathalie could see a slight frown contract Monsieur de Sainville's brow, and Madame Marceau turning pale as she beheld it.

"You will fell the poplar-tree, to-morrow," quietly resumed her brother, and he walked on.

The silence that followed seemed uncomfortable to all. Nathalie lingered behind. Madame Marceau gave her a hasty look, and, probably thinking she was out of hearing, addressed her brother in a low tone:

"I hope, Armand, the imprudence of Charles —"

"We will not mention it," he interrupted; "let him not act so again."

"I am sure André must have misunderstood him."

"I agree with you, that André misunderstood him; and as he committed a mistake, not a fault, he shall be welcome to return, if he chooses."

"I am sure he will be quite grateful," said Madame Marceau, biting her nether lip.

"Why not for having been so  
abruptly dismissed. The fact is, I am  
satisfied he was disobeying an order  
would give such an order  
conducted in one would prefer  
Madame Marceau made no mistake  
was not broken, until Monsieur  
towards Nathalie, and observed—  
"May I ask your opinion of it?"

Nathalie came up with a half-smile.  
"It is only a gardening question."  
"I am lamentably ignorant of gardening."  
"And the courage of being mistaken will  
grace is not the courage of your age; but  
will teach you some day to utter a  
blunder, with suitable unconcern. In the  
pray let me have your opinion. Shall this  
remain as it is, or shall we enliven it with a  
flower?"

"I should pronounce in favour of the flowers."  
"Why not?"

"They are so beautiful."  
"But of a frivolous, transient beauty. Yet your  
suggestion shall be adopted. Taste must have its  
minine element, and I have been giving these  
too dark and severe an aspect. What is the ground  
Rosalie?" said he, addressing his sister, who, after  
listening to him with evident irritation, and frequently  
applying the vinaigrette, was now turning away with  
indignant majesty.  
"I feel unwell, Armand," said she, coldly.

Then let us go in, and take aunt *en passant*."

Madame Marceau retired to her room for the rest of the day. When her brother came down to the sitting-room in the evening, Nathalie felt much vexed at the mixture of politeness and indifference with which he treated her presence. "Did he mean to awe me? He might find himself mistaken!" But, alas! it was only too apparent that to awe her or produce any effect upon her was the last of Monsieur de Sainville's thoughts. Half out of curiosity, half out of defiance, she ventured to differ from him once or twice, and tried to see how he would take it. He took it very well indeed — smiled — seemed a little surprised, and a little amused — heard her politely, but without giving her arguments great weight — and treated her, in short, with the good-humoured forbearance which a man of his years and experience might be expected to display towards a young and somewhat presumptuous girl. In vain she looked cold, dignified, and displeased. Monsieur de Sainville would not notice her vexation or acknowledge her claims, but persisted in treating her with the most provoking and gentlemanlike courtesy.

"Petite," said the Canoness, when he was gone, "how hot you look! Is the room close?"

Nathalie gave her a searching glance, but there was no mistaking the innocent simplicity of her look. More than she said, she evidently did not mean.

"Yes," answered Nathalie, "the room is very close."

The lamp was still unlit when she went up to her room, but a ray of light from the opposite turret fell on the polished oak floor. The young girl looked out — the light came from Monsieur de Sainville's window,



and she could see him pacing his room up and down in a regular and monotonous promenade.

"He seems restless enough, for one so quiet-looking," thought Nathalie, as she stood by her window, watching him before she allowed the curtain which she held back with her hand to drop once more; "but impenetrable and mysterious as he chooses to appear, it shall go hard if I do not learn to read and understand him yet."

## CHAPTER VIII.

"**MADemoiselle MONTOLIEU**, how demure you look to-day," said a soft, bland voice behind Nathalie, as she stood on the following morning working in the embrasure of the drawing-room window. A fair hand, sparkling with jewels, was lightly laid on her shoulder, Nathalie turned round, and beheld Madame Marceau. Her cheek had a hectic tinge, deepened by the reflection from the crimson curtain near which she stood; her eyes were feverish and restless, her lips parched and dry; but she smiled down very graciously on the young girl, whose passive hand she took within her own. "You are not privileged to be grave, like me," she continued; "you see, my child, I have not always met those in whose honour and strong sense I could trust. I must sometimes misunderstand motives and actions; but I have been speaking to Armand this morning: he has made clear that which seemed obscure — there is no misunderstanding now." She spoke significantly, and pressed her hand.

Nathalie did not answer. The lady eyed her keenly.

"**Mademoiselle Montolieu**," said she, drawing her-

self up with melancholy dignity, "certain positions are dearly bought. Others can be unwell — can heed their sufferings; we belong not to ourselves; we must act a part; but we are human — the reaction inevitably follows."

"And I fear you were very ill yesterday," said Nathalie.

"Ill!" sharply echoed the lady; "no, I was only nervous; my health is excellent. Aunt," she added, turning towards the Canoness, "have you been telling Mademoiselle Montolieu that I am ill?"

"I, Rosalie! no: but Armand said yesterday evening he would send Doctor Laurent to you."

"He is too kind — I am quite well," said her niece, whilst a forced smile parted her pale lips.

Aunt Radegonde, laying down her knitting, began a grave lecture on the danger of neglect; but Madame Marceau angrily exclaimed,

"I tell you I am not ill, aunt."

The Canoness coughed dubiously, but held her peace.

A week passed away. Monsieur de Sainville was away at Marmont; his sister dropped her patronizing tone, and treated her young guest with much politeness and consideration. Nathalie was beginning, however, to feel a touch of *ennui* at the stately routine of her new existence, when one morning she unexpectedly learned that her sister had returned. She resolved to call upon her immediately; but she had promised to join the Canoness in the drawing-room, and, in passing by, she entered it to excuse herself.

Neither Aunt Radegonde nor Madame Marceau occupied their usual seats; but the room was not lonely,

for, standing with his back towards her, Nathalie perceived Monsieur de Sainville. She had not so much as suspected his return from Marmont. Her first impulse was to retire; but he looked up, saw her in one of the large mirrors, and turned round composedly. Though he could scarcely repress a smile as he detected her look of annoyance, he greeted her with his accustomed politeness. Nathalie looked cold and reserved, and remained standing near the door.

"I am fortunate in meeting you thus," said he, quietly, "for I very much wished to speak to you."

Nathalie came forward half-hesitatingly. He wanted her to be seated, but she declined, "she preferred standing." She did not look shy, but proud, and, though she knew it not, half-offended. Her whole bearing said, "I do not intend this interview to last very long."

"I believe you are going out," said Monsieur de Sainville, "and I do not wish to detain you. I have only one question to ask: may I hope you will do me the favour of answering it? You have been about a week in Sainville; do you like your sojourn here?"

Nathalie had not anticipated this question. She hesitated, sought for a proper reply, and found none so suitable as the plain one, "very much, Sir."

He looked pleased.

"I am gratified to hear you say so, in that frank way, for to say the truth, I feared that at your age, and with the tastes natural to youth, this house must prove very dull. Do you think," he added, after a pause, "you would like to dwell here for some length of time?"

Nathalie looked embarrassed.

"I believe I should," she at length replied; "but —"

"I am not asking you to bind yourself to anything," interrupted Monsieur de Sainville; "indeed, the latter question was perhaps premature; but I am happy to learn Sainville is not disagreeable to you."

With this the conversation ended. Nathalie left the room wondering what Monsieur de Sainville meant, and so much occupied with this thought that she wholly forgot her intended apology to the Canoness, and even passed by Mademoiselle Dantin's door without remembering that she had once lived there.

The town of Sainville was irregularly built on a declivity; its steep, narrow, and ill-paved streets overhung with high, projecting houses, most of them built of wood, rendered it one of the most picturesque and gloomy little places in all Normandy. It had been an abbey town before the first French revolution, and a sort of perpetual twilight and monastic silence shrouded it still. A few dull shops scarcely relieved the monotony of the well-like streets, with their gaunt old houses rising in dark outlines against the bright blue sky. When Nathalie had first come from her gay sunny Provence to this gloomy town of the north, she had candidly wondered at the human beings who, without any seeming necessity, could resign themselves to inhabit this misanthropic-looking spot. Even now, accustomed to it as she had grown, she found, after leaving the light and airy old château, that the very houses along which she passed had an air of greater dreariness and *ennui* than ever.

Madame Lavigne, the aunt of Rose, resided at the other extremity of the town, in a retired little court, or rather alley, lying within the deep shadow and

sanctified gloom of the old abbey. Grey, vast, and imposing, it rose facing a row of narrow houses, on the other side of the pathway, which had been used as a passage to a side-door of the edifice, in former times, when the abbey was in its pride, and devout pilgrims thronged Sainville at the yearly and gorgeous festivals of its patron saint. But a neighbouring railroad had reduced the little town to complete insignificance; the faithful had fallen off in zeal and numbers; the side entrance had long been closed up, dust gathered through years, and carved stone ornaments fallen from a neighbouring and half-ruined tower, lay heaped up against the wooden door; the long grass grew freely on the worn out, but now untrodden threshold, and between the damp flags of the lonely court. Rocks had made their nests in the ruined tower, where they cawed all day long, whilst grey swallows skimmed about at twilight, and twittered beneath the eaves of the low-walled and abandoned cloisters. A wild pear-tree, growing in the neglected grounds within, overhung the low roof and narrow court in which it shed its pale blossoms every spring, and russet leaves every autumn; beneath it, in a sheltering angle of the building, stood a small stone cross and well; the gift to the town of some pious burgher, of that age of faith when an idea of sanctity seems to have been linked with clear and flowing waters. The well-worn steps attested it had once been greatly frequented, but none, save the inhabitants of the court, came to it now; another fountain, twice as large, profusely gilt and bronzed, with a gay nymph instead of the lowly and faithful cross, stood in the neighbouring thoroughfare. Little heeding the changes of human caprice or creed,

clear and sparkling as ever, the pure water flowed on, and fell into its little stone basin with a low cheerful murmur, like a bountiful soul that gives freely still, in spite of all the neglect and ingratitude of man.

It was opposite this fountain that the house of Madame Lavigne stood. Nathalie gave a low knock at the door; it opened ere long, and an elderly, morose-looking female appeared on the threshold. Without uttering a word, or opening the door an inch wider than strict necessity required, she admitted Nathalie, closed and bolted the door, pointed up a dark spiral staircase, and entering a low kitchen, in which there seemed to reign a sort of dull twilight, she resumed her culinary avocations. Nathalie ascended the staircase, paused on the first-floor landing, and, opening a door before her, entered without knocking.

The apartment in which she found herself was wide and extremely low; it was one of those unhealthy *entresols* now met with only in old-fashioned houses; it was scrupulously clean, but everything, from the antiquated furniture of dark walnut-tree wood, the dingy looking-glass over the mantel-shelf, and the low ceiling, down to the cold bees-waxed floor, had an air of gloom and discomfort. A doubtful and yellow light seemed to penetrate slowly through the narrow and discoloured panes of a solitary window, but it won no reflection back from the dark surface of surrounding objects; heavy curtains of sombre hue, which fell from the ceiling to the floor in long folds, added to the austere and meditative gloom of the place. Partly shrouded by the dark folds of one of those curtains, and seated within the narrow circle of light which came from the window, appeared a

quiet female figure: pale, thin, and motionless, she bent over her work in subdued harmony with all around her. She did not raise her head, or turn round on hearing Nathalie, but laid down her work, carefully put it by, and rose so slowly that she had not yet left her place, when the young girl stood by her side. This was Rose Montolieu, the sister of Nathalie.

It would have been difficult to find two beings more different than the two sisters as they now stood together in the dull light of the narrow window, and exchanged a quiet greeting. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, with a figure rounded, though graceful and slender, with the soft bloom of health upon her cheeks, and the clear light of youth in her eyes, Nathalie looked as gay and sunny a vision as any to which her own native Provence ever gave birth. Not all the chill and gloom of the cold room could mar that fresh and poetic beauty: the warmth and brightness of the southern sun were around her still.

But the mournful austerity of the northern home in which her lonely youth had been spent, had fallen early on Rose Montolieu. She had worked and sewed as a child in the dull light of that window, and in that dreary-looking room; the court below, the bubbling fountain, the ancient abbey, and the half-ruined tower had daily met her view for years, and for years the farthest wall of the cloister and an old church-yard which it inclosed, but where none were buried now, had bounded her narrow horizon. Unless on Sundays and holy days, when she heard masses and vespers in the abbey church, Rose seldom or ever went out. Traces of this sedentary life were

impressed on her whole appearance. She was not ugly, nor was she handsome, for either would have been striking, and she looked pale and colourless like a flower reared in the shade. She was tall, rather thin, and she stooped habitually; her figure would have been good but for its total want of grace; her features were regular, but sallow and deficient in character or marked expression. The brow indeed told of intelligence, and the mouth, closed and quiet, of reserve; but the general outlines were pale and dim. Flaxen-coloured hair and light blue eyes added to the sickness of her appearance. This effect was increased by the best point in her face, teeth of dazzling whiteness and purity, but which only added to the wanness of her whole aspect, when her pale lips parted in a faint smile of rare occurrence. She looked upwards of thirty, though she was in reality a few years younger. Never was the name of Rose bestowed on one whose pallid look was more likely to suggest a painful contrast to the bloom and beauty it implies.

She took Nathalie's extended hand, stooped to imprint a kiss on her forehead, then sat down again and resumed her work. Nathalie took off her bonnet and scarf, seated herself by her sister's side, and was the first to speak.

"Well, Rose, how are you?" she asked, in her gay, cheerful tones.

"Very well," slowly answered Rose, and the grave, melancholy cadence of her low voice contrasted as strikingly with that of her sister as did her personal appearance. She worked in silence for a few minutes, then looked up and said, "I saw Mademoiselle Dantuin yesterday."



"But you do not judge me from her account?" very quickly returned Nathalie.

"No, I shall judge you from your own."

Rose laid down her work, and looked up as she spoke thus. This was a trying moment for Nathalie. She respected her sister more than she loved her, — she knew so little of her, and they felt so differently. She complied nevertheless with the desire of Rose, and related to her all that had happened before and since her departure from Mademoiselle Dantin's school.

"I suppose it could not be helped," thoughtfully said her sister when she had concluded. "How do you like your present position?"

"Very much indeed, Rose; it is a pleasant change to live in that fine old château, with its quaint garden and pleasant grounds; to be mistress of my time, and not to be teased by tiresome Mademoiselle Dantin."

Rose glanced at the limited horizon beyond her narrow window, then at the room so dark and dreary, and finally at her handsome sister.

"Yes," she said, in her low tone, "that place must suit your fancy well; but how do you like your hosts?"

"They are kind, though a little peculiar; the Canoness is simple and charming; she calls me Petite, though I could make two of her. Her niece, the grand lady, was proud and patronizing at first, but has much improved since she understands that I have no ambitious designs on the heir of the Sainville race. There is also a certain impertinent and yet artistic femme-de-chambre — in short, all is wonderfully different from the next-door house."

"And Monsieur de Sainville?"

"I have seen little of him."

"But what do you think of him?"

"I do not think of him at all."

She spoke coldly. Rose eyed her with slow surprise.

"What do you think of his nephew?" she resumed.

"That he is handsome, cool, and confident," replied Nathalie, smiling.

"You think him handsome?"

"Yes, indeed! And you look wonderfully alarmed, Rose."

"Do you love him?" asked Rose, almost quickly.

"Love him!" echoed Nathalie, much offended.

"I mean, do you think you will like him some day?"

"Really I cannot tell."

"You make me feel anxious," said Rose, nervously laying down her work; "you are so heedless, and that young man seems to me so unprincipled. Were his intentions ever honourable?"

"He dared not have had any other; he dared not, Rose," cried Nathalie, almost angrily; her look kindled, and her cheek flushed in a moment.

"You defend him."

"I defend myself, Rose!"

Rose fixed her mild, earnest glance on that gay, handsome face, over which still lingered the flush of wounded pride.

"I will not advise you," she said, "for you do not follow advice; but I have seen that Charles Marceau. Handsome as he is, I like him not. I like not his eye nor his look. Oh! Nathalie, to the woman he loves, that man, so young in years, so old in aspect,

will bring nothing but sorrow, and to the woman who loves him nothing but tenfold woe. Besides, that family is so proud! Oh! sister, do not love him; do not, even were he an angel of light."

"And he is more like an angel of darkness. Come, Rose, do not look grave. I am here, he is in Paris; and as I happen to be as proud as all the Marceaus and the De Sainvilles, I promise you that, even were he an angel of light, this dangerous Charles Marceau shall be nought to me."

Rose looked more easy. There was a pause.

"Do you like Monsieur de Sainville?" she resumed, abstractedly.

"What matter, Rose, whether I do or not? it will not trouble him much."

"Do you like him?"

Nathalie coloured, hesitated. "No," she at length resolutely replied.

"And why not?" gravely asked her sister.

"Because I do not like him."

"But I want to know why."

"Well then because he is disagreeable and proud."

"Do you mean ill-tempered?"

"No, he rules his temper, as he rules everything, — with the iron hand, in the velvet glove."

"Then what do you dislike him for?"

"Dislike is a strong word. I care not for him. He may be harsh and proud; it is nought to me."

"Harsh and proud! this argues little with the noble story of his youth."

"And pray," asked Nathalie, smiling somewhat ironically, "what do you see so very noble in the character of one who devotes the best part of exist-

ence to the ambitious task of winning back a lost wealth and position, and who, whilst paying his father's debts, does not lose the opportunity of making a very handsome fortune?"

"Have you lost your old admiration for the heroic, or is this mere perversity?" asked Rose, a little indignantly. "Monsieur de Sainville is only too good to think about you."

"Which is not at all, Rose; take my word for it."

"I see," quietly said Rose, "he has hurt your pride, or rather your vanity. Foolish girl! Do you know he took the trouble to call on Mademoiselle Dantin and explain this matter to her. She told me herself, and confessed she had been much too hasty. At the same time she said you were the most fiery and vindictive little thing she had ever met with."

"Which amiable character she no doubt gave to Monsieur de Sainville," observed Nathalie, colouring, and looking vexed. "I am very much obliged to him for calling on my greatest enemy, and fishing out my faults from her."

"Fishing out your faults," said Rose compassionately; "child, what interest can a man of his years and experience take in the faults, or good points, of a girl of eighteen?"

"Very well," replied Nathalie, evidently nettled, "the girl of eighteen cares little for either his years or experience; that is one comfort."

"Early this morning," continued Rose, "Désirée told me a gentleman wanted me below. I came down; it was Monsieur de Sainville, sitting where you are sitting now."

Nathalie remained mute. Her sister resumed:

"He came to me, as your only relative, to apologize and explain. I told him I feared your sojourn at the château would excite some attention, upon which, though not without much hesitation, he suggested that you should remain as his aunt's companion. Still I objected, but when he asked if your sudden disappearance from the town of Sainville would not give rise to more disagreeable conjectures, I could not but confess it; and you unfortunately know too well that I have no home to offer you. You must stay there a few months at least."

Nathalie looked very thoughtful.

"Rose," she said at length, "I retract; he is kind to me at least. You called me perverse. Oh! if you only knew how I long sometimes to yield reverence and homage. But enough of this: how is your aunt?"

"Irrecoverably blind, and she knows it. She is coming down."

Nathalie did not say how little she desired to meet Madame Lavigne. She rose, turned towards the window, and leaning her brow against the glass pane, looked out. The brightness of the blue noonday sky beyond, seemed to render the court more dark and dull than usual, yet a streak of sunshine from behind the old abbey, gleamed through the thin foliage of the pear-tree, whilst its light shadow waved to and fro over the little fountain. Nathalie thought of the warm old garden of Sainville, and the thought made both court and fountain look more cold and chill than ever. She glanced at her sister. Rose was bending once more over her task, silent and motionless. "And this,"

thought Nathalie, "is her home, her life; and were she to live another century, I verily believe she would be found in that same place; the patient slave of that old tyrant."

The door opened, and Madame Lavigne entered, supported by Désirée, who, near her mistress, looked gentle and benignant.

It was not age, though she was old, that gave so harsh and repulsive a look to the aunt of Rose. The low brow needed not the furrows of years to be stern and forbidding; and wrinkles could scarcely add to the sour expression of the mouth, with its downward and contemptuous curve: notwithstanding the dulness of the slightless eyes, the expression of the whole face was acute and shrewd; but it was the shrewdness of cunning, not of intellect. On seeing her enter, Rose got up, drew a large arm-chair forward, and helped her to be seated.

"Do not handle me," snappishly exclaimed Madame Lavigne; "you know I cannot endure it."

Rose withdrew in silence.

"You might give me the pillow whilst you were about it," said her aunt, in the same ill-tempered tone; "but that is like you — officious and doing nothing."

Rose took a pillow from a chair, shook it, and placed it behind her aunt, who only waved her impatiently away.

"Enough," she briefly said, "I hate fondling; I know what it means. Désirée," she added in a soft civil tone, as the patient Rose returned to her seat, and resumed her work, "is my chop ready?"

"Not yet," was the reply, more laconic than respectful.

"I shall be glad of it. when it is read: I mean to hurry you, but I shall be glad of it."

"Of course," returned Désirée, with a toss of the head; but she did not go, or hurry. She loitered about the place, wiped a few particles of dust from the furniture with her opened the window, closed it again, and at last descended to leave the room. Nathalie turned to resume her seat: in an instant the murmured blind woman were alive with a strange mingled anger and alarm:

"Who is that? You have got some one with Rose. Who is that?"

Nathalie laughed gaily. "Oh! merry little Nathalie, who is always laughing, and always makes one laugh," said Madame vigne, with an attempt to smile graciously; "is she?"

"Here," replied Nathalie, rising, and approaching her.

"Ay, here she is," continued the blind woman, stretching out her hand towards the young girl; "she is, with that cheerful voice, which does one good to hear. Oh! dear child, if you were my niece, I would amuse me in my old age, without interested motives. But there is one comfort," she added after a pause, "I have only an annuity which dies with me, let those think the contrary who will."

Nathalie glanced at her sister, but if Rose had been as devoid of hearing as her aunt was of sight, she could not have remained more unmoved. "I suppose," thought Nathalie, "poor Rose is accustomed to it."

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"*shall be glad*," said the blind woman, in a slightly impatient, though it was conciliatory still, "how will *be hurry you* little Nathalie amuse her poor old friend *course,* Will she sing one of the funny Provençal *head; but* take off that cross Mademoiselle Dantin? *uttered her* I got that she is at the château now, — comfort *of dust from* governess, what is it? Then I suppose it is *low. closed* Monsieur de Sainville she will take off; come, *re the room* dear."

*it: in an* assumed a listening attitude; but Nathalie *alive with* replied:

*alarm:* Monsieur de Sainville is not at all odd; and as *you have* happens to be my best friend now, I shall not take *it.*

*it.* He turned to move away, but the blind woman *Nathalie. re* her fast.

*laugh,* "So he is your best friend," she said, with a pleasant smile. "Ah! Well, girls of eighteen might *smile* be older men for their best friends."

*rising.* Nathalie coloured, but did not deign to reply.

*d the* "And is that best friend of yours very kind?" concluded Madame Lavigne.

*e. roared* "Very kind."

*rich de* "True: best friends of thirty-five or forty — that *re my* is age, is it not? — are always kind, especially —"

*about* "Madame Lavigne," interrupted Nathalie, "you *be at* will please not to talk so. I will not hear it." *lies.*

The blind woman laughed — a short, sour laugh.

*Bo.* "Little spitfire, that is how you used to go on with *at 3* poor Mademoiselle Dantin; that is how you will go on with the best friend ere long. Heaven help him, poor man! Oh! you need not tap your foot so impatiently, I know I am teasing you; but, child, you are nothing



unless you are teased: I know, when I could see, you never looked half so pretty as at those times. Ah! I dare say you are smiling now; but you need not, you foolish child; the beauty of southern women never lasts: they are old at twenty-five. Now, if you were like Rose," she added, after a pause, "pale, ugly —"

"Rose is not ugly," angrily interrupted Nathalie; "she is pale; but if she had only exercise and fresh air, she would be quite blooming. She has what an aunt of hers never had, — nice, gentle features. Of me you may say what you like; but I warn you I will not hear a word against Rose, who has enough to endure from your tyranny."

She spoke hotly, and her eyes sparkled, half with anger, half with tears. The ill-tempered spite of Madame Lavigne against poor Rose, though familiar to her, always inspired her with the same indignant surprise; for to a generous heart, injustice, however old, seems ever new.

The vehement reproaches of the young girl, uttered in a rapid tone, which rendered her southern accent more apparent, only drew a sarcastic smile from the blind woman.

"So, I am a tyrant," she said, as if rather flattered by the imputation. "I am; I know it: from a child I would have my way. Rose can leave me if she likes, and she remains —"

"Because she is too good," roundly interrupted Nathalie.

"Oh! she is, is she? Well, talking of the best friend has put you out of temper. Sing me one of the Basque songs, whilst waiting for that chop, which I think Désirée will never bring."

Pity for Madame Lavigne's infirmity, and the desire of lessening the weary burden Rose had to bear, generally induced Nathalie to endure with good-humoured patience the covert irony concealed under the blind woman's kindness; but on this day, instead of complying with the request of Madame Lavigne, whose side she had left, she turned her flushed face towards the window, and remained obstinately silent.

"So we are offended," said Madame Lavigne, after waiting awhile; "we do not like allusions to the best friend. Ah! well —"

The entrance of Désirée, bringing in the long-expected chop, checked what she was going to add. Rose took the tray from the servant, placed it on a small table, cut the meat, arranged everything, and, having brought the table near to her aunt's chair, resumed her own seat in silence.

Madame Lavigne ate a few morsels, and frowned.

"It is not done enough," said she, crossly.

This remark having elicited no corresponding observation, she added, in a sharper tone:

"Did you hear, Rose? My chop is not done enough."

"Will you have another, aunt?"

"Another, when meat is at the price it is! Another chop! Is the girl mad?"

"Then what is to be done, aunt?"

"Time to ask, indeed! What is to be done? You might say what should have been done?"

Rose made no reply.

Madame Lavigne ate a few morsels more, then laid down her plate indignantly.

"You have the worst heart in the world," she exclaimed, with a sort of snarl; "here I keep telling you

that my chop is not done enough, which implies that I shall feel miserable for the whole day; and you never so much as say you are sorry for it. Did I adopt and rear you up at my own expense for this, you ungrateful thing? To punish you, I shall not touch a morsel more; I shall not eat another bit to-day. There, take the plate away; and ring the bell."

Rose complied. The sour-faced Désirée made her appearance.

"Well," said she sharply, "what am I rung up for? I warn you," she added, turning towards her mistress, "I am not going to trot up and down at your pleasure. What do you want?"

"There, do not be cross," soothingly said Madame Lavigne; "but you see, Désirée, the chop was very good, — very good indeed, only not quite done."

"Not done enough?" indignantly echoed the servant. "You dare tell me I do not know how to cook a chop — a mutton chop! Then depend upon it that is the last chop I shall cook for you."

"My dear Désirée!"

"And we shall see how matters will go on when I am away. How much more candle will be burned in the week; how much more wood it will take to fill the cellar; with oil for the lamp, and money for everything. Go your ways; another shall cook your chops soon; ay, and help to eat them too."

"Désirée!" exclaimed Madame Lavigne, utterly distressed at this lamentable picture of household ruin, "you must not go. I cannot afford to let you go. You are the most honest creature breathing; I could trust you with every cupboard in the house."

"Every cupboard!" ironically ejaculated Désirée,

"as if there was what would fatten a mouse in any of your cupboards."

"Give me the chop," submissively said Madame Lavigne; "I will eat it."

"Eat it! Do not; it would poison you. Ah! well, my chops will not trouble you long."

Madame Lavigne wrung her hands.

"Rose! Nathalie, my dear child!" she exclaimed, "do somebody give me that chop; I want it; I have not had my dinner. There," she added, with a sigh, as Rose complied, and she ate hastily what was on the plate; "there, I am sure you cannot complain of me, Désirée."

But Désirée was not mollified. People might eat her chops, or not eat them — she did not care. Thank heaven, she was independent, and need not be any one's servant. She might sit with her arms folded all day long, if she liked; ay, and have a house of her own, too. In vain, Madame Lavigne apologized, coaxed, and entreated; Désirée was not to be moved, and after once more recapitulating her wrongs, and dwelling with scornful emphasis on the fact of the chop not being done enough, she left the room, with a sneer at the waste and ruin to be perpetrated by the blind woman's future servant.

The lamentations of Madame Lavigne were loud and deep. She hated that old Désirée, she did; but she could not do without her.

"You see what your cruel want of sympathy has done, Rose," she exclaimed, throwing, as usual, all the blame on her patient niece. "You are the cause of it all. That old Désirée is as sour as vinegar, but I could trust her with untold gold. Go down to her

directly; she has a stupid sort of liking for you: and you may tell her, too, that I shall make her a present one of these days."

Rose left her seat. Nathalie, who now stood ready to depart, followed her sister out of the room; she felt too indignant to address Madame Lavigne with even common civility.

"Wait for me here," said Rose, pausing in the passage, and entering the dark kitchen, where Désirée had retired to brood over her wrongs.

Rose addressed the servant. Nathalie could not hear what her sister said, for she spoke in a low tone, and stood turned away from her; but she heard Désirée's reply.

"Stay, Mamzelle Rose! Not I. She shall have another servant soon, and one who will rob her, I hope."

Still Rose urged something, which did not reach Nathalie's ear.

"And why should I stay," sharply asked Désirée, "to please that selfish old creature?"

"She has had much to try her," said Rose, gently; "her husband beat and ill-used her."

"Serve her right," muttered Désirée.

"The son whom she loved robbed and deserted her; and now she is a blind, infirm, and aged woman."

"And is that a reason why she should torment every one around her, and make a martyr of you? I am more than a match for her; but you — so patient, so enduring! It has often made my blood boil to see how she used you; and, believe me, I have avenged you many a time: but that is over now."

"Then you will go," said Rose.

"Why should I stay? she hates me in her heart, and you are so quiet, that you will not miss me much."

"And so," continued Rose, "the face that has been a familiar one for so many years shall be replaced by that of a stranger."

Désirée peered wistfully into her face.

"Will you miss me, then, when I am gone?" she asked, "will you miss the cross old woman, who never had a kind word for you, nor for anybody else?"

"I shall miss you, Désirée," was the low reply.

"Then you do care for me, after all; quiet as you are, you do care for me. Ah! Mamzelle Rose, how can this be?"

"Because, God help me, I have had few or none to love," exclaimed Rose, in a tone of deep and involuntary sadness. "Will you stay?" she added, after a pause.

Désirée looked at her; then turned away abruptly.

"I shall see," she said, in a rough tone, and evidently wishing to close the conversation.

Rose left her without pressing the subject further; she understood Désirée, her temper, and her ways, and knew that the point was won.

"Oh! Rose, Rose," exclaimed Nathalie, as her sister stood once more by her side, "is this to live?"

"It is the will of God," replied Rose, in a low tone.

She said this very simply, without false humility or empty denial of sacrifice, but like one to whom that holy will had become the daily sanctification of existence. And as she spoke, a smile of singular sweetness broke over her pale features, whilst something of the light which illumines the martyr's glance passed

in her eyes; the lingering and dearly-bought triumph of a spirit nature had made proud, and which will and faith alone had rendered meek.

Nathalie said nothing, but taking her sister's thin hand, she reverently raised it to her lips as they parted.

## CHAPTER IX.

NATHALIE truly loved her sister; but, from witnessing such scenes, she always entered Madame Lavigne's house with regret, and left it with relief. She now breathed more freely, as the gloomy door closed behind her; and when she reached the old château, standing on the brow of the hill, in the clear sunlight, with its airy turrets rising against the blue sky — when she entered the broad avenue, with its stately elms, and passed beneath the majestic portico, Nathalie forgot the doubts and fears of Rose. "What matter about the future," she thought; "it is good to be here!"

She found the Canoness sitting at the end of the lime-tree avenue, and engaged in a very close conversation with Amanda. She looked pleased, though a little disconcerted, on seeing Nathalie. The discreet *femme-de-chambre* quietly retired.

"Do you feel too tired for a walk over the grounds, this lovely morning?" asked Aunt Radegonde.

"I never feel tired," replied Nathalie, taking her arm, with a smile.

But the Canoness was not ready yet; there was an immense shawl to be wrapt round her person, to fall down in graceful folds, like a theatrical mantle, and

sweep the alley like a train, before she could think of moving a step.

"Amanda is a nice girl," said the Canoneß, as they took a narrow path, with a row of tall trees on one side, and a smoothly-shaved lawn extending far away on the other, "but she must be kept at a distance. Take an elderly woman's advice, child; never make free with servants."

"I must do like you," said Nathalie, smiling demurely.

"Exactly," answered the Canoneß, with a complacent nod. "*Entre nous*, Petite, I do pique myself on the art of keeping subordinates at a distance, without *hauteur* — that would be unkind — but with that sense of dignity which is incumbent on one who may be said to be the head of the family."

Nathalie glanced down at the insignificant little figure by her side; but Aunt Radegonde was quite in earnest, and feelingly lamented the serious responsibility fate had thrown upon her.

"We are quite alone to-day," resumed the Canoneß, with one of her abrupt transitions. "Rosalie is gone to spend a few days with the De Jussacs. Armand is gone also," she added, after a pause.

"With Madame Marceau?" quickly said Nathalie.

"No; to Marmont. To say the truth, Petite, he does not care much about the De Jussacs; but do not say I told you so; — it is quite a secret. I feel rather tired; shall we rest awhile?"

A bench stood near them, beneath a sycamore; they sat down.

"Then we are quite alone to-day?" carelessly said Nathalie.



"Quite. Armand does not come home to dinner."

"How often you are deprived of his company; you must feel it very much."

The Canoness coughed.

"Of course, of course," she slowly replied.

"And how harassing those frequent journeys must prove to Monsieur de Sainville."

"Not at all, Petite. Armand's property is at Marmont, and he likes to superintend it himself; besides, he is rather restless."

"Restless, Marraine! and his manner is so quiet!"

"Quiet!" echoed the Canoness, shaking her head.

"Ah, well!"

She closed her eyes, and pursed up her lips. Nathalie said nothing; she was looking thoughtfully at the little lake lying beneath the old cedar-tree, beyond the lawn before her.

"My dear," suddenly asked the Canoness, "did you say that Armand was quiet?"

"I only spoke of my impression."

"Ah! but it is very dangerous to have wrong impressions, especially about the tempers of people with whom we live; and though I am singularly reserved — Nature was in a reserved mood when she fashioned me, Petite — and never open my lips on family matters, I think it proper to set you right in this point. Armand is not at all quiet, my dear; he is rather —" She hesitated.

"Irritable?" suggested Nathalie.

"No; for it is most difficult to vex him."

"Passionate, perhaps?"

"He never gets into a passion; but he is not quiet. Some think him a little stern; I do not at all, of course;

but being his aunt, it is not likely he would presume to show anything of the kind with me. But the other day, when you spoke to him in the library, did you not think him rather severe, Petite?"

And the little Canoness, inclining her head on one side, looked wonderfully interested.

"Oh, no!" calmly answered Nathalie.

"Ah, well! I dare say not; indeed, my dear, if I ask, it is solely for your benefit. Take it as a rule, that reserved people, like me, are never inquisitive. Also, if I speak of Armand, it is merely to enlighten you; and though you are very reserved, I can see that you understand me."

"I fear I am very dull, Madame, for I assure you I did not understand —"

"I am a little deaf to-day," quickly interrupted the Canoness, "but do not mind repeating. As I was saying, Armand's cold manner signifies nothing; — he can be very kind, very generous."

"Kindness and generosity are his characteristics, then," said Nathalie, almost involuntarily.

"Yes," hesitatingly replied the Canoness. "You see he has a very strong sense of duty, iron will, and some pride, and so — But, *à propos*, this reminds me of what I said yesterday, about not refusing any little civility Armand might offer you. I had a motive for that, as I have for everything I say. I could see by his manner, he felt friendly towards you. I learned this morning that my penetration had not deceived me."

Nathalie looked up inquiringly.

"Yes, this morning, Armand sent me a very respectful little note, requesting the favour of an interview. I granted it, of course. He came to my boudoir,

and, in that deferential manner with which he always addresses me, he asked my opinion of you: 'Did I think you were happy here? Was not the place too dull for so young a girl — almost a child?'"

"A child!" exclaimed Nathalie, colouring; "why, I am eighteen."

"You only look sixteen; so it comes to the same."

"But to look younger does not take away actual years," quickly said Nathalie.

"Yes, it does," quite as quickly rejoined the Canoness. "A friend — a very particular friend of mine, looks full ten years younger than her real age; I contend that she is ten years younger."

"But that friend of yours is not old."

"She is not very young. But, Petite, take my advice, do not use the word old: it is not refined. 'An old woman!' can anything be more odious: always say, 'elderly,' — 'an elderly lady.' Well, as I was saying, Armand asked me 'if the place was not too dull for so young a girl, almost a child, and one too who seemed even more gay and thoughtless than most girls of her age.'"

"Thanks to Aunt Radegonde's reserve, I am likely to hear a very flattering account of myself," thought Nathalie, with a rising colour and somewhat scornful look.

The Canoness continued. "I told him that I thought you quite happy, but that it would be best to ask you; that I had no doubt you would answer truly. 'Quite my opinion,' he replied; 'I saw from the first she was a very artless little thing.' *Chère Petite*, I was so pleased. Monsieur de Sainville likes candour above all things, and detests equivocating people. But though

I had solved his doubts he was not satisfied; I could see better than he could himself what he wished; — men do not understand those things; and so I suggested that you should stay here as my companion: he agreed, provided you consented. So, Petite, it rests with you now to say, yes or no." She looked up at the young girl with evident anxiety.

Nathalie's eyes were bent upon the earth. She raised them at last, and there ~~was~~ something in her look and in the smile that now parted her lips, which Aunt Radegonde, with all her penetration, could not fathom.

"You are good, — truly good," said she, in a low tone.

"Then you consent; I am so glad. Come, I feel quite rested, and as you are never tired, we will go on. Petite, you look pensive?" she added, as they resumed their walk.

"Madame —"

"How often must I tell you to call me Marraine."

"Well, then, dear Marraine," said Nathalie, laying her hand on the arm of the Canoness; "allow me to ask if Madame Marceau knows of this?"

"Madame Marceau!" echoed the Canoness, drawing up her little figure with an air of offended dignity; "and what has my niece to do with my affairs? — If instead of one companion I chose to have two, — ay, or twenty, Rosalie would not presume to interfere."

Nathalie smiled, and made an apology which immediately soothed the placable Canoness, who assured her that Madame Marceau would be quite as much pleased as herself, or Monsieur de Sainville.

"Then Monsieur de Sainville is pleased?"

"Yes, Petite; he said he did not think I should regret this plan. 'I am sure I shall not,' I replied; 'she is a good child; I saw it instantly, and my first glance never deceives me.' 'Yes,' said he, 'she has a pleasant face; and though the old schoolmistress wished me to believe her of a most violent and fiery temper, I think for my part she is only a little petulant.'"

"Only a little petulant!" echoed Nathalie, stopping short in the path with indignant amazement.

"Yes. So you see he has quite a favourable opinion of you: otherwise you may believe I should never have repeated all this."

"Indeed, I am much obliged to Monsieur de Sainville," replied Nathalie, speaking very fast. "A child, more gay and thoughtless than most girls of her age, — an artless little thing with a pleasant face, and only a little petulant! How flattering!"

"Yes, Petite, and he would not speak so of every one; for he is rather hard to please."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, there is beautiful Mademoiselle de Jussac, whom he scarcely allows to be pretty. When Rosalie talks of her wit and talent, he says he cannot discover that she has much of either; he confesses, however, that she has the quality he most prizes in woman: gentleness."

"Indeed!" again said Nathalie. There was a long pause.

"Here is the green-house," said Aunt Radegonde; "are you fond of flowers, Petite?"

A sudden turning of the path brought them within view of the green-house, as she spoke. It was a light elegant rotunda, supported by pillars, and standing on

a flight of circular steps in the centre of a small green lawn. A grove of firs and cypress-trees sheltered it from the northern winds; it shone amidst their dark foliage like a white Grecian temple, sacred to the worship of some solitary wood nymph. One of the wide arched windows was open to admit to the flowers and shrubs within, the warm sun of noon and the soft breezes of the south.

"But this does not look at all like a green-house," exclaimed Nathalie, recognizing the temple-like building she had seen from her window.

"It was a ball-room formerly; and the first ball given there was opened by my aunt, Mademoiselle Adelaide de Sainville, when I was quite a child. *Chère Petite*, it was very beautiful! The trees around were all hung with lamps, and within, the hall was lit so brilliantly, that it looked here like a blaze of light. The orchestra, hidden in a recess of foliage, played the sweetest music imaginable; whilst lovely ladies and gallant-looking gentlemen moved along in their stately minuets, — not foolish quadrilles. And I verily believe I never saw such handsome women as I beheld that night. There was tall and handsome Mademoiselle d'Albe, with eyes brighter than her jewels, and a handsome neck she used to arch so proudly. She walked up and down the hall in an interval of the dance, with a whole bevy of gentlemen hanging about her, for she was witty as she was beautiful: poor thing! they say she walked to the guillotine with the same stately step. Then there were the three Mesdemoiselles de Moustier, all in white and lovely as angels; and Madame d'Estang, who danced so well, and had the prettiest foot ever seen; and Madame de

Merville, whose voice sounded like a silver bell; and many more besides: but, handsome as they all were, my aunt Adelaide was the queen of the ball."

"Was she so very beautiful?"

"Beautiful! Ah! Petite, women are not what they once were. There certainly never lived a lovelier creature than my aunt. There was grace in every one of her movements, and a charm beyond every thing in her look and her smile. She was rather dark, but her eyes were so deep and soft. In short, you may judge of her beauty, Petite, by the fact that Monsieur de Sainville, though so critical, admits it. I have a portrait of her up stairs, which I will show you. Will you come in and look at the flowers?"

They entered. Flowers of varied scent and hue everywhere greeted their gaze. Some stood together in gaily contrasted groups; others, pale, star-like things, gleamed in solitary beauty through their dark leaves; fresh garden blossoms, exotics rare and frail, delicate heaths, dark orchidæ, of fantastic shape, and large wax-like flowers from many a far and foreign land, were gathered there. As Nathalie now slowly paced with the little Canoness, that long-deserted ball-room, which had once echoed to the gay sounds of the dance, and heard the hum of pleasant voices, she thought of the brilliant scene Aunt Radegonde had beheld there; she thought of the long-faded beauties, as perishable and as lovely as the frail flowers she now saw; of their gay smiles and bright looks, of their short-lived pleasures, and evening triumphs still more brief.

"If it were night," said she, in a thoughtful tone, "I should feel quite timid here."

"Timid! Why so, Petite?"

"I should fancy the place haunted. Take away the blue sky, the sunlight, and the cheerful day; imagine night abroad, making all things shadowy, vast and dim; those dark cypresses rising against almost as dark a sky; the moon shedding her soft, pale light on the green sward, and stealing in through the half-open casement, just revealing enough to make you fear all that she leaves in mysterious shadow. Imagine all these things, and I assure you, aunt, those fair flowers, now so bright and gay, will become as the pale spirits of the lovely ladies you described awhile ago. Look at that fuchsia, so slender and elegant, with its purple bells, — there is majesty in all its bending grace: it is handsome Mademoiselle d'Albe covered with jewels; those green and erect laurels are her suitors; the three delicate camellias, standing apart, are the three fair sisters; that lively little yellow flower, up there by itself, and still dancing to the breeze, must be the lady with the pretty foot; and the modest, retiring-looking blue bell is as surely her of the clear, harmonious voice. As for your beautiful aunt, behold her there in that fair royal lily, the queen of all around her; how serene, how lovely she looks; and as the breeze just bends her stately head, how gracefully she seems to perform the honours of the revel!"

The Canoness looked puzzled. She glanced at the flowers, and from them to Nathalie. The young girl was standing near her in a thoughtful attitude, her head slightly averted, her cheek supported by her hand, in a way familiar to her, her look slowly wandering over the graceful flowers her fancy had for a moment conjured up into the long-vanished guests of



the lonely hall. A stream of golden light from the autumn sun fell on her through the open window, and as it mellowed into a sunny brown the waves of her jet black hair, and gave to the brilliant bloom of her cheek a rosy hue as soft and yet as warm as that with which the setting sun lights up the western sky, Aunt Radegonde thought that, to none of the bright southern flowers gathered there, did that light lend a richer warmth and more fervid radiance.

"Petite," she said, smiling, "you are very romantic. You must surely be descended from one of those old Provençal troubadours, both poets and knights, who wandered over Europe, — now jousting at tournaments, now singing at floral games, or helping fair ladies to hold and preside over courts of love."

Nathalie looked up with a merry laugh, and the clear, silvery sounds awoke in the old hall echoes to which it had long been a stranger.

"Hush!" said she mysteriously, "we must not laugh, — the place is haunted; and surely there never was a more pleasant ghost-chamber; but the perfumes of these fine ladies make one feel quite faint; shall we not go and leave them to their enchanted solitude?"

They left the place as she spoke. As they took the path that led homewards, Nathalie turned back to give one last look and see, as she said, that the flowers had not resumed their original shapes as soon as their backs were turned. But the spell which bound them — if spell there was — remained unbroken: the white temple rose silent as ever in its bower of dark northern trees, and the soft breeze of noon still

brought low-whispered tidings from without to the captive beauties of the old hall.

"It was a happy idea," thoughtfully said Nathalie, "to convert that gay ball-room into a green-house;— beauties and flowers! The transition is very poetic."

"But not intentional, Petite; Armand not being romantic like you; and but for his passion for flowers —"

"Has Monsieur de Sainville a passion for flowers?" quickly asked Nathalie.

"Indeed he has; they are the only luxury in which he indulges. His room and the library are always full of flowers, and he comes here every morning to inspect the progress of his favourites."

"He called them frivolous, transient things, the other day," exclaimed Nathalie.

"Oh, did he?" said the Canoness, with a slow cough. — Nathalie began to understand that sign. — "Well, you see, Monsieur de Sainville is peculiar, and being peculiar he has peculiarities. He never says he is fond of flowers, — he never speaks of them indeed; and if he did speak of them, I dare say it would be disparagingly. I conclude he is fond of them from observation. I observe a great deal, — he may think them frivolous, valueless things, and yet like them; you understand. But we will change the subject."

She looked mysterious, and uneasy, as she always did when speaking of her nephew, and the conversation was continued on ordinary topics until they reached the château. Aunt Radegonde then bade the young girl go up to her room, take off her things, and significantly advised her to trust herself to the guidance of Amanda, when she wished to join her.

The femme-de-chambre looked fully as mysterious when Nathalie, having invoked her assistance, asked her whither she was leading her along those dark passages and strange-looking staircases? "She had been forbidden to tell; but Mademoiselle would soon know." She paused as she spoke, before a door, which she opened with the intimation "that this was the boudoir of Madame la Chanoinesse."

Nathalie entered, and by the octagon shape of the room, perceived it was a turret chamber, similar to her own. Small as the apartment originally was, the variety of objects it contained, rendered it smaller still; yet there was no confusion, and all was tastefully arranged.

"What a *bonbonnière*!" exclaimed Nathalie, glancing around her admiringly; "a perfect jewel."

"Little flatterer," said Aunt Radegonde, reprovingly; but her face beamed with pleasure.

"I never saw such a place," continued Nathalie, still standing in the centre of the room, and examining everything; "how beautiful and soft the light comes in through those rose-coloured curtains; and that delicate paper with flowers so fresh, that they look ready to be gathered. Oh! Aunt Radegonde, there is only one explanation possible: you are a fairy, and this is your bower."

She turned as she spoke towards the Canoness, who, chilly as usual, was seated by the fire-side. With her gold cross, her handsome black dress of rich brocade donned for the occasion, her cap, and ruffles of rare old lace, her soft white hands demurely folded on her knees, and her Cinderella feet, which, to use her own phraseology, had turned so many heads in

her younger days, coquettishly resting on a cushion — she looked very fairy-like indeed.

"Petite," she answered smiling, "you have childish fancies."

"You are a fairy," decisively resumed Nathalie, who saw very well this last fancy was not at all displeasing, "and I will prove it. It was a fairy needle wrought these embroidered chairs; it is a fairy's hand that daily tends those exquisite flowers in their bed of moss; a fairy brought those beautifully tinted shells from the deep sea, and enchanted that bird in its golden cage. The last crowning proof of all is, that the whole place not being larger than a good-sized nut-shell, none but a fairy could live in it."

"But you see it will hold two."

"And I dare say, it could even hold three; four it could not. Well might Amanda lead me along such tortuous staircases and mysterious passages! I suppose you throw a spell over the place, like Peri Baoou over her palace, in the old Arabian tale. Shall it sometimes be visible for me?"

"Always," was the gracious reply. "I have not often been here of late; but now I will come. You shall have a key to enter when you please."

"Delightful!" said Nathalie, gaily; "and I promise you to do as I did to-day, when, actuated by a presentiment of the truth, I attired myself in my best to pay you all proper honour."

"And you look very well, Petite," approvingly replied the Canoness, attentively eyeing the young girl, who was now seated on a low settee opposite her; "look at yourself. It must be your white dress and the pink curtains behind."

Obeying the injunction of the Canoness, Nathalie looked up; in the depths of the large mirror before her she saw a graceful figure clad in a light white robe, leaning on one elbow, and half-bending forward, with a look and attitude that became it well. She saw it with its clear brow and soft dark eyes, and her lips parted with a smile, as she slowly turned her look away. She knew that the vision which had greeted her gaze was beautiful and bright, but beautiful of its own beauty; that no toilet's meretricious art had given harmony to those graceful features, symmetry to the bending figure, and that the pure bloom of the clear cheek was not borrowed from the curtain's rosy hue. She turned towards the Canoness as if struck with a sudden thought.

"You said you would show me the portrait of your aunt."

"Look behind, on your right, child."

Nathalie turned quickly round. On either side of the window was a female portrait; that which the Canoness had designated, represented a richly attired lady of singular loveliness. Dark-haired, dark-eyed, with arched eyebrows, a clear profile, cheeks like the peach, and ripe smiling lips — she seemed the gay, handsome creature Nathalie had imagined; but though she looked at the portrait long and fixedly, she said nothing.

"Do you not think it handsome?" asked the Canoness.

"Yes," slowly answered the young girl, looking at the other picture as she spoke.

This painting was greatly inferior as a work of art to the other, but it represented a young girl in all the

grace and freshness of youthful beauty. Curls of thick clustering hair of that *blond-cendré* so much esteemed in France, shaded features so exquisitely lovely, that Nathalie thought they must belong to some ideal being. The deep blue eyes, transparent complexion, and half-parted lips, displaying the pearly teeth within, rendered the whole countenance inexpressibly charming.

This time, Nathalie's admiration was fully expressed.

"What a lovely countenance!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, I told you so."

"Oh! I do not mean your aunt Adelaide, but this portrait."

"Oh! this." The Canoness spoke slowly. She looked up at the picture, and shaded her eyes with her hand, as if to see it better.

"Is it a portrait, and a good likeness?" continued Nathalie.

Receiving no reply, she turned round. The little Canoness was looking at the picture in the same attitude, but her hand shook visibly, and her eyes were dim. Nathalie stood silent and astonished; gazing by stealth at the lovely face that seemed to be smiling down on her, and wondering what sad story could be linked with those serene features.

"The fire is very low," abruptly said the Canoness, as Nathalie resumed her seat; she stooped to arrange it, and though the fire burned brightly, the task took her long to accomplish. Nathalie took up a book from the table — it was the *Revue* — and opened at the tale "*Mystère*." She laid it down pettishly.

"I detest that tale!" she said. The Canoness was

leaning back in her chair, grave, thoughtful, and unusually silent. She did not answer, and did not seem to have heard her. "Do you think the author means to say that mad girl will marry that bad man?" continued Nathalie, wishing to break through this awkward silence.

"Petite," said the Canoness, with sudden earnestness, "do you ever think of marriage?"

"Sometimes — not often," replied Nathalie, a little surprised.

The Canoness shook her head solemnly.

"I wish the answer had been 'Never.'"

"Is it such a dangerous thought?" asked Nathalie, laughing.

"When I make observations," said Aunt Radegonde, drawing herself up with an offended air, "I expect them to be listened to with due gravity; but no matter."

The little Canoness was not one of those whose reproaches could rouse Nathalie to defiance; far from it. She rose quickly, and, walking up to Aunt Radegonde's chair, looked, as she felt, touched and sorry.

"I did not mean to be rude, — indeed I did not," she said, very earnestly; "and you are so good," she added, in a half-arch, half-coaxing tone, "that I do not think you can be angry very long."

"Oh! Petite," replied the placable Canoness, making Nathalie sit down on the cushion at her feet, and eyeing her wistfully, as she laid her hand on her shoulder; "how is it that when I see a young girl like you, thoughtless, handsome, and happy, my heart yearns towards her at once? And if you had not laughed, I would have given you some good advice."

"To which I shall listen very attentively now," soothingly said Nathalie.

"You will not be the first that has done so," replied the Canoness, with a touch of consequence; "nor yet the first gay child that has sat thus at my feet, and looked into my face," she added, in a sad and lower tone. Her lips trembled, and again her eyes grew dim.

"And the advice?" quickly said Nathalie.

Aunt Radegonde was once more consequential and erect.

"It shall be on that point most important, most fatal to woman — marriage! But, perhaps, Petite, you may yet determine to lead a life of celibacy, like me?"

"Is it not good to be prepared for every emergency?" demurely asked Nathalie.

"True, Petite; well, then, to be methodical, we will divide that advice under three heads, — the man you wish to have, the man who wishes to have you, and the man you ought to have."

A mischievous smile played on Nathalie's features.

"Could we not blend those three characters into one?" she asked, very gravely.

"Impossible!" cried the Canoness, looking shocked at this heterodox suggestion; "why they are three wholly different individuals. The man you wish to have sees it — they always see it, and he becomes a tyrant: they always are tyrants in such cases. The man who wishes to have you is exacting, jealous, and will fret your life away. But the man you ought to have has esteem and affection for you, just as you



have esteem and affection for him. You have exactly the same tastes, the same feelings; you always agree, you never quarrel — nature made you for one another.”

“Marraine,” very quickly said Nathalie, “I will never have him; he is good, honest, an excellent cousin, brother, or uncle, all whose offices nature has evidently destined him to fulfil, but I will never have him.”

“Who, then, will you have?” asked the Canoness, very gravely.

“Why, if I must choose, one of the other two.”

“But which of the two?”

“The one who likes me,” replied Nathalie, after a brief pause given to reflection; “I shall rather fancy receiving incense and adoration, — being a sort of household divinity.”

“Well,” said Aunt Radegonde, with a sigh, “I am glad you did not at least choose the other one, for *he* is the worst of the three.”

“But why is *he* the worst?” asked Nathalie, amused at the gravity with which she spoke of those imaginary characters.

“Because you like him, and he knows it. Petite, you do not know that man: he is proud, exacting, and would find fault with an angel of light. Give a woman the beauty of a goddess, the wisdom of a sage, the temper of a saint, — he will find fault with her still. If she is plain, she ought to be handsome; if she is handsome, beauty is but dross; if she is spirited, he calls her shrew; if gentle, tame; if she is prudent, he finds her cold-hearted; and giddy if she is a little gay.”

“Why, what a morose, disagreeable man!” ex-

claimed Nathalie, very indignantly; "and yet, proud as he is," she added, after a pause, "he too could be made to stoop."

"You do not know him," said the Canoness, shaking her head: "you do not know him; how proud, how jealous, how exacting the love he receives has made him. Let us take an imaginary case, — quite imaginary, you understand."

"Yes, imaginary; but about him."

"About him and a young girl — any young girl."

"Yes, any young girl. Shall she be beautiful?"

"Very beautiful."

"As beautiful — I mean as good-looking as your Aunt Adelaide."

"More, Petite, more — she shall be the fairest creature eye ever saw, as gentle and winning as she is lovely."

"What! is she all this, and does he not love her?" impatiently exclaimed Nathalie.

"He does, Petite. Not love her! it would not be in human nature. Stern, forbidding as he is, he shall never speak to her in the same voice in which he speaks to others; he shall never look at her with the same look: but some are as inexorable in their love as others in their hatred, and *he*, Petite, is one of them."

She spoke in a low impressive tone, but Nathalie looked up at her smilingly.

"If she loves him, and he loves her," she said softly, "where can the mischief be?"

"Oh! Petite," sorrowfully replied Aunt Radegonde, "you are a child, and, child-like, you think that to be young, pretty, and loving is enough."

"And why is it not enough?" earnestly asked Nathalie.

"Because much love has made him exacting; he will be over her as an inexorable judge that forgives nothing."

"But where there is affection, it is so easy to forgive."

"Not for him — not for him."

"Then he is vindictive."

"No; for he does not avenge the wrong; but neither does he forget it."

"But what does she do to vex him? She must do something; what is it?"

"We will suppose anything," said the Canoness, after a pause; "for you do not forget this is quite imaginary."

"Oh! yes, — quite imaginary."

"Well, then, we will suppose that he is called away; she remains at home, sorrowful and pining."

"I see, I see," interrupted Nathalie, in her impatient way, "he is faithless, whilst she — oh! she, would wait for him for ever. He is a very bad man. I do not like him at all," she added, with great warmth.

The Canoness looked a little disconcerted.

"No, Petite; it is not exactly so. You see, she loves him; but she is so gentle, so good, that she will sacrifice herself: in short, it is an old story; they make her promise to marry another."

"Then she does not love him!" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Yes, she does; but she is yielding gentleness itself. Well, he returns in time to save her; for he can save her: and though the man they would give her to

is young, handsome, rich, and enamoured, she would far sooner have her old love. Well, what do you think he does?"

"He leaves her to the fate she has chosen," indignantly exclaimed Nathalie; "and he does well."

A flush rose to the brow of the Canoness; the hand, which still rested on the shoulders of the young girl was hastily withdrawn.

"You justify him," said she, eyeing her almost sternly; "you condemn her to misery!"

"Misery! No. She, who was weak to love, shall be weak to suffer; she shall marry, be unhappy for awhile, and then be comforted, and forget."

"Oh! you arrange it thus, do you?" replied Aunt Radegonde, with a sad and somewhat bitter smile; "but why should it surprise me? I have always noticed it; the young are severe, and very hard. Well, then, since you understand all this so well, tell me what becomes of him."

"He suffers, but does not complain."

"Suffer! How can he suffer? Did he not reject her willingly?"

"He rejected her, because it was not the woman he wanted, — but the love of the woman. How could he care for it, once faith was gone, and her truth was broken? Do not think he feels nothing," she added, warming with her subject. "Oh! he still loves, but with the brooding, vengeful love of the wronged heart. He bitterly regrets the past, but he repents nothing; he would still cast her from him, though his own heart should break, or, worse, bleed for ever."

She spoke so earnestly, that her eyes grew dim, and her lips trembled. There was a pause.

"Petite," said the Canoness, in her usual tone, and once more laying her hand on the young girl's shoulder, whilst she eyed her thoughtfully, "you grieved me so much awhile ago, that I thought I should never forgive you, — never love you again. But now I see you spoke from ignorance: how should you know the truth? You have not lived the years I have lived, nor seen the sad things I have seen. You give to her the heartlessness of man, — to him the enduring, even though resentful love of woman. His heart break! Any man's heart break! You simple child, know that it is she who dies of grief, and he — why he lives on. But, oh! Petite, you may have your own sorrows, your own trials yet; do not be so severe."

"But all this is imaginary, is it not?" asked Nathalie, hesitatingly.

"Why you did not think it was real, did you?" quickly asked the Canoness.

"How could I?"

"No; of course you could not."

"Well, then, since it is imaginary," said Nathalie, "what does it prove? *He*," she smiled as she emphasized the word, "*he* is the corner-stone of your edifice; remove him, the rest falls to the earth. Now, as he is unreal —"

"Petite," interrupted the Canoness, "he is not unreal."

"He is not!"

"No. Do you remember I once spoke to you of a certain person?"

"Whom you called 'that person,'" quickly rejoined Nathalie.

"He and that person are much alike; and the

woman for whom that person will break his heart is not born, and will never exist."

"You think so," thoughtfully said Nathalie.

"I know it. Nay, more; I always had the presentiment no woman could or would love him; that she would have more fear than love in her heart. I am not superstitious, Petite, though I might be so, having had some extraordinary dreams and presentiments, which *never* deceived me; but in that presentiment I always believed; — ay, though he was neither fool nor coward, nor any, of those things women hate by instinct, I always felt he could not win love."

"But why so?"

"Because he was too proud, too unbending, to yield us the homage nature has made ours by right," replied the Canoness, drawing up her little figure in all the majesty of feminine dignity.

Nathalie's lip curled with a haughty smile.

"What! is he so proud as that?" she said, disdainfully. "I should like to see him humbled — ay, thoroughly."

"But you never will, Petite," quickly rejoined the Canoness.

"Why not?" promptly asked Nathalie.

"In the first place, because he will not allow himself to be humbled; in the second, because he is no visitor here. You must not think, Petite," she added, smiling shrewdly at the momentary disappointment expressed by Nathalie's features, "that I should be so indiscreet as to describe, in such peculiar terms, too, a person you could recognize. No; I am very reserved; and, take my word for it, you will never recognize 'that person' in any of our guests."

Nathalie looked up, and smiled a peculiar smile.

"I shall not try," she replied, quietly.

"No, do not; but profit by my example, and make reserve your rule of conduct. And, Petite," she earnestly added, "will you not meditate on that other advice I gave on that point most important, most fatal to woman, — marriage? Remember! divided under three heads: the man you wish to have (but as I have shown, the very last you ought to have); the man who wishes to have you; and the man, — mark, Petite, — the man you *ought* to have."

"But whom I will not have at all," quickly rejoined Nathalie. "No, indeed, I cannot," she added, very gravely, and noticing the Canoness's look of chagrin, "I give you my word I cannot. He is a good, honest sort of man, — a great deal too good for me; I know I ought to like him, *mais c'est plus fort que moi*," she added, with a very decisive wave of the hand.

The Canoness remonstrated, a little peevishly; "he was," she declared, "the only good one of the three." But Nathalie was rebellious, and would not hear of him.

The contest lasted long, and was not yet over when they were called to their early and quiet dinner. The subject being then dropped, was not resumed subsequently.

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## CHAPTER X.

EVENING was come; the Canoness had fallen asleep in her chair by the fire-side, whilst Nathalie loitered about the room, inspecting and admiring the various treasures of petrified birds' nests, miniature boxes, fairy-looking baskets, and specimens of rare old china gathered in the little boudoir. After sleeping for about an hour, Aunt Radegonde awoke; to her dismay the fire had burned out; the room looked lonely.

"Petite, where are you?" she exclaimed, in a tone of chagrin.

The rose-coloured curtains opened, and Nathalie stood smiling before her.

"I came here when you fell asleep," she replied.

"When I fell asleep!" exclaimed the Canoness, in a nettled tone. "I was not sleeping, Petite; but I do often fall into a meditative mood after dinner, and I was particularly meditative this evening. What were you doing near that cool window?" she added, as Nathalie resumed her seat.

"I was watching the wind."

"Watching the wind, Petite? How strangely you talk! The wind is invisible."

"Not so invisible but that, like most mysterious people, he betrays himself by his deeds; therefore have I been watching him whistling round the corner of this turret."

"And what did the wind say?"

"Wonderful things, no doubt, but which, not being a fairy, like you, I could not understand; but I can tell you what he did: he tossed the chimneys about,



knocked down a flower-pot or two from an upper story; pleaded in a soft, pitiful voice to get in at this window, and not being admitted, moaned away along the avenue, and spitefully smashed one of the branches of those great trees."

"*Ah! mon Dieu!*" uneasily said the Canoness; "what a boisterous night! I dislike the wind; it sounds so very dreary."

"But it is nothing at all here," observed Nathalie, smiling. "I recollect an old château in Provence, something like this, but standing by the sea-side, and uninhabited, save by an old housekeeper, who let me roam about at will, for I was a child then, and something of a favourite with her. There was a long gallery — a picture gallery once, but then almost bare, and very dreary, where the wind seemed to hold his peculiar revels, and never since have I heard anything so unearthly. I know not how it was, but the sound always seemed to come from behind me. I would walk very slowly along, listening, for sometimes his windship picked his steps as daintily as any lady, then he suddenly quickened his pace and I quickened mine as well; it seemed a race between us: we reached the door together; I darted out without even once looking behind me, and flew down stairs breathless between pleasure and fear."

"Then you were afraid?"

"Mortally afraid; and there was the charm. That gallery was to me as a ghost story whispered by the fire-side, or a Radcliffe romance read with a solitary candle in a lonely bed-room. The old garden, full of poplars, was nearly as pleasant: it was delightful to stand in their deep shadow, listening to the rustling

above, and when the breeze became more keen, and swept down the avenue, to feel it blowing my hair back, and scarcely allowing me to catch my breath. Oh! our Provence is a pleasant place; and how often in Mademoiselle Dantin's dull school-room have I longed to be away, to stand in that solitary avenue thick with fallen leaves, for just one short quarter of an hour, to listen to the wind and the poplars again."

"Petite," said the Canoness, bending forward, "you must not talk so; you are getting excited."

"It is the wind," gaily replied Nathalie.

"Ah!" thoughtfully observed Aunt Radegonde, "you are like my kitten, Minette, who, poor little thing, always gets frisky in windy weather."

"Am I frisky to-night?" asked Nathalie, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Very much so; and to keep you in proper order, I shall give you this knitting to finish."

Nathalie took the knitting, which seemed to produce the desired effect of subduing her spirits, for she fell ere long into a deep reverie, and the quiet prosing of Aunt Radegonde reached her ear, but went no farther. About an hour had thus elapsed when a servant came up with a message from Monsieur de Sainville, desiring to know whether his aunt would allow him to wait upon her. Nathalie, absorbed in her knitting, never stirred or looked up; the Canoness seemed slightly flurried.

"Certainly," she quickly answered; "we shall be very happy to see Monsieur de Sainville. You see, Petite," she added, addressing Nathalie, when the servant had retired; "how deferential Armand is; I

assure you he would not think of entering this room without my express permission."

Ere long a step was heard upon the stairs, the door opened, and Monsieur de Sainville entered. The table had to be removed for him to take a seat between his aunt and Nathalie; in spite of all Rose had told, the young girl remained cold and distant. But this was a fact which did not seem to produce a very painful impression upon her host; his discourse indeed was almost exclusively directed to his aunt; the subject, to Nathalie's great disdain, was the result of the crops and the state of the country; from this there was a transition to the more poetical theme of gardening.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Monsieur de Sainville, suddenly addressing Nathalie, "I caused some flowers to be put in the centre of the grassy plot, as you suggested; but they look very gay near the dark yews; they are evidently unsympathetic natures; have you seen them? What do you think of them?"

"I have seen them, Sir, and do not like them at all," answered Nathalie.

"Do you think they ought to be removed?"

"Nay, Sir; I think they will do to stay, and read a good lesson on the danger of taking and following the advice of the ignorant."

She spoke as demurely as a nun; never once looking towards Monsieur de Sainville to see how he would take this; but as she sat opposite Aunt Radegonde, she could meet her astonished look. There was a pause. The Canoness seemed uncomfortable.

"How very high the wind is," she observed at length, by way of opening the conversation; "do you like to listen to the wind, Armand?"

"The wind, aunt?" he musingly replied. "Why yes, I believe I had some such fancy when I was a boy."

"Ah! well, Petite likes it very much; she stood listening to it for a whole hour this evening."

"You like it?" inquiringly said Monsieur de Sainville, turning towards Nathalie.

"When I have nothing better to do, I like it well enough," she carelessly answered.

"She doats on it," continued the Canoness, without noticing Nathalie's look of vexation; for there was something peculiarly disagreeable to her in being thus made the subject of a conversation addressed to Monsieur de Sainville. "Yes, she does indeed," resumed Aunt Radegonde, too well pleased with so easy a topic of discourse to abandon it in haste. "There was an old château by the sea, somewhere in Provence, with a lonely gallery and an ancient garden, where she used to go, and listen to the wind for hours."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu is romantic," said Monsieur de Sainville, with his peculiar smile.

"Romantic! indeed she is. You should have heard her in the hot-house to-day. She transformed all the flowers into ladies, — gave them names and described their characters."

"Decidedly romantic," continued her nephew. "Fortunately," he added, noticing, perhaps, Nathalie's look of increased annoyance, "she has not reached the age when romance becomes forbidden."

"Oh!" quickly said Nathalie, "I do not wish to avail myself of that plea. I ought to know better, of course, since I am eighteen," she added, a little hesitatingly, and yet unable to resist the temptation of

letting Monsieur de Sainville become aware of this important fact. She spoke, moreover, in a tone of quiet dignity destined to inspire him with what, notwithstanding all his politeness, she greatly doubted that he felt for her — a proper degree of respect.

"Indeed!" said he, very gravely. "Eighteen! Oh! of course, that alters the matter completely. Eighteen! Why, at that age of mature reason and varied experience, the romance of life is quite over."

Nathalie coloured deeply, but kept her eyes fixed on her work; to all appearance, it occupied her completely.

"My dear child!" exclaimed the Canoness, in a tone of dismay, "what can you be thinking of? You are letting down your stitches as fast as you can."

"Oh, no!" quickly answered Nathalie, "it is all right."

"All right! Why, Petite, I saw you dropping the stitches. Show it to me. There, do you see," she added, as Nathalie reluctantly surrendered her work. "*Ah! mon Dieu!*" she continued, with evident consternation, "it is all wrong. Petite! Petite! where can your thoughts have been wandering for the last half-hour?"

"Nowhere, indeed," said Nathalie, very quickly; "but the mistake will soon be mended," she added; and taking the work from the hand of the Canoness, she drew the needles out, and deliberately unravelled it.

Aunt Radegonde eyed her with surprise.

The young girl's clear brow was now slightly overcast; her cheeks were flushed, her lips compressed; she looked a not unattractive picture of vexation, as she stood on the hearth, her face half-averted, her

hands so zealously engaged in unravelling her previous task, that they threatened not to leave any token of her mistake.

"Take care, Petite, take care!" soothingly said the Canoness; "do not go so fast, nor allow yourself to be so easily put out; you will, I fear, meet with greater misfortunes in life than a piece of knitting going wrong. Why, what a strange girl she is," she added, as Nathalie's half-averted features lit up with an arch smile; "there she is laughing; awhile ago she looked ready to cry. It must be the wind makes her so changeable; she confessed to me it made her as frisky as my kitten, Minette." This was uttered confidentially, and addressed to Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie coloured to the very temples, and looked far more vexed than before.

"Madame," she quickly cried, "You said that —"

"I did not."

"But what a very peculiar fact," observed Monsieur de Sainville, turning towards Nathalie; "does the wind indeed affect you in that strange manner, Mademoiselle?"

Nathalie, who had resumed her seat, laid down her work on her lap, and looking at the speaker, said, with great gravity:

"In what strange manner, Sir?"

"Does it affect your spirits, or — I speak, alas, from a practical knowledge of Minette's disposition — your temper? Pray excuse the question; but this is an interesting physiological fact."

Was this meant in earnest, or was it mere trifling? Nathalie did not know; she at all events drew herself up with an air of offended dignity, but it would not

do; laughter glanced in her dark eyes, and an irrepressible smile played around the corners of her mouth — compressed in vain.

"No," she demurely replied; "the wind might have affected me so when I was a child, but of course it cannot do so now."

"Ah! of course," said Monsieur de Sainville, smiling; "both feelings and temper have become so calm, so sedate at the mature age of eighteen."

"My dear child!" exclaimed the Canoness, in a nervous tone, "do put by that knitting, or we shall have some new mishap."

The knitting was dropped as if it burned Nathalie's fingers; but scarcely was restored to Aunt Radegonde's safe-keeping when the young girl exclaimed:

"What shall I do? I cannot endure to sit thus, doing nothing."

"You are industrious," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Industrious! not at all," exclaimed Nathalie, with a look and tone implying a perfect disdain for the compliment; "I cannot endure idleness, simply because it fills me with *ennui*."

"You are right for all that," persisted Monsieur de Sainville, whom Nathalie began to suspect of a desire to tease her, — a suspicion not wholly displeasing to her childish vanity; "depend upon it, *ennui* was the serpent who tempted Eve, even in Eden."

"Oh! Eve and the serpent," exclaimed the Canoness, catching only the last words; "ah! what a pity Eve was not more reserved."

"You would have been so," observed her nephew, smiling.

"I cannot tell," cautiously replied Aunt Radegonde;

"it is imprudent to boast; yet I do think I should have been more reserved. Do you not think you would, Petite?"

Nathalie shook her head dubiously.

"Oh, yes, you would," persisted Aunt Radegonde; "do you not think she would, Armand?"

"Of course," carelessly replied Monsieur de Sainville, who had taken up the *Revue*, and was slowly turning over its pages.

"You have too good an opinion of me, Madame," said Nathalie, addressing the Canoness somewhat coldly; "I should have acted exactly as poor Eve."

"Petite, you cannot tell."

"Yes, I can, for I have done it," was the reply, more prompt than discreet, and perchance Nathalie felt so herself, for she looked somewhat confused as the incautious admission escaped her lips.

"Oh!" said the Canoness, very much astonished.

Monsieur de Sainville laid down the book, and turning slowly on his chair, eyed Nathalie with his calm, penetrating gaze.

"You have tasted the forbidden fruit?" he said at length.

Nathalie hesitated slightly, but she answered "Yes."

"And pray — I ask to be instructed — what sort of taste had it?"

"The taste of experience, I suppose — bitterness."

"And how did you feel after it?"

"Hot and feverish."

"Petite!" interposed the Canoness, who seemed vexed at the freedom of Nathalie's self-accusations; "how can you compare a childish disobedience, for the purpose of securing some forbidden delicacy, with the



great disobedience of Eve? It was forbidden knowledge she coveted, you know."

But Nathalie would not avail herself of this excuse, perhaps, because she disdained to do so; perhaps, because the slight smile which curled Monsieur de Sainville's lip told her it would be unavailing.

"And so did I," she answered, quickly; "for good fruit I had in plenty, and therefore did not value; but knowledge, knowledge of good and evil, — forbidden knowledge, was rare and tempting."

"Well," said Monsieur de Sainville, "you are at least frank about it; and really," he added, after a pause, "you speak as if the taste of the apple were still on your lips."

"She speaks very heedlessly," stiffly said the aunt.

"Pray," continued Monsieur de Sainville, without heeding her, "what sort of a shape did the serpent take?"

Nathalie met his keen look very quietly.

"There was no serpent," she answered, smiling, as she thought he looked slightly baffled.

"Oh! an act of your own free will," he observed, somewhat dryly; "much better still."

"No serpent! Then after all, it was not like Eve," put in the Canoness.

Nathalie did not reply.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Monsieur de Sainville, "you are really cruel. After exciting my aunt's curiosity, you stop short."

"My curiosity, Armand; my curiosity, Monsieur de Sainville!" exclaimed the Canoness, laying down her knitting with evident indignation; "well, if I pride myself on anything, it is on not being at all inquisitive."

"I hope you are not in this instance, "Madame," said Nathalie, very gravely, "for the whole story is so childish, that I assure you it will not bear telling."

"Well, but what is it, Petite?" suddenly asked the Canoness, wholly forgetting that she was not inquisitive; "was it a fruit you tasted?"

"Yes, a fruit."

"And what fruit?"

"The solanum."

"Why, it is a poisonous berry; did you know that?"

"Yes, I knew it."

"And yet you ate it," said the Canoness with evident surprise.

"Aunt," interposed her nephew looking up from the Revue, which he had taken up once more, "do you not see, Mademoiselle ate that berry because it was poisonous, which certainly constitutes a great point of resemblance with Eve?"

Nathalie said nothing. The Canoness resumed.

"What could your motive be, Petite?"

"Mere childishness; a whim — a fancy."

"A fancy for poisonous berries?" continued Aunt Radegonde; "how very strange!"

"Oh!" hesitatingly replied Nathalie, who now seemed thoroughly annoyed with the subject, "it was not exactly because they were poisonous; but an old sailor who had travelled in the east, once described to me a fruit which grew there and which he said procured a most delightful trance. I foolishly concluded it to be the solanum, which grew in our garden, — a treacherous, luscious-looking fruit; so the next day I went —"

"And plucked it directly," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Oh! no," coldly replied Nathalie; "I took time to consider. I knew the fruit was poisonous; but then by not eating too much, I should be safe; in short," she added with a penitential sigh, "I did it."

"And what was the result?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"A week's thirst, dizziness and fever," answered Nathalie, with a half-rueful, half-comic look; "if I had only enjoyed my expected treat, I should not have cared much; but it was all suffering — no pleasure."

"But I hope you felt duly sorry," said the Canoness, very gravely.

"No; I was only disappointed."

"But, surely, Petite, you know it was very wrong."

"Wrong! why so? If I had not eaten the berries, then I should be longing for them to this day; whereas now all the berries in this world would not tempt me."

"A shrewd reasoning," remarked Monsieur de Sainville, "and one which, applied to graver matters, could not fail from introducing some new principle in ethics."

"Well, Petite," observed the Canoness, admonishingly, "you must not do so any more; do you hear?"

"Aunt," interrupted her nephew, with his peculiar smile, "you remonstrate in vain; Mademoiselle Montolieu has only had a taste of the apple, she will return to it yet."

Nathalie coloured very deeply, but it was not

in her nature to be dismayed. She soon rallied, and replied, looking up: "Not to that apple, at least."

"Oh! then you do contemplate tasting some other."

"Perhaps so, I cannot tell." Nathalie spoke with apparent carelessness, but in spite of her usual daring, she felt annoyed and disturbed.

"Mademoiselle," continued her pitiless host, "you have forgotten the most interesting part of your story. How old were you when you ate the berries?"

Nathalie stooped to see if the fire, which was out, wanted arranging, and made no reply. Her face was crimson when she looked up again; as she did so she met the look of Monsieur de Sainville fastened on her with an expression that implied he still waited for her reply.

"It was some years ago," she said at length.

"I am sure she was a mere child," officiously observed the Canoness.

Monsieur de Sainville smiled.

"I suspect," he remarked, quietly, "that a mere child would not have thought of any such thing. Mademoiselle Montolieu had more probably reached the age for making experiments: thirteen or fourteen, I should say. Ah! I know it," he added, as Nathalie gave a slight start.

"Yes, it was about then," she rejoined, carelessly; but indifferent as she strove to appear, she now devoutly wished in her heart, that Eve's apple and Nathalie Montolieu's berries had never been mentioned that evening.

Nathalie laboured under an infirmity not uncommon to girls of buoyant spirits and little discretion or experience; she did not know that there are a thousand innocent things that a woman, especially when young, is expected not to say, under pain of being thought vain, presuming, and even immodest. But that mixture of ease, self-possession, and propriety of bearing which the world requires of youth, is not natural to it: it is not even pleasing, because it is premature; the charm of the woman sits ill on the inexperienced girl: she has her own grace, which varies according to temperament, for, after all, it is only a question of temperament, — and she, who in very lightness of heart gives utterance to every passing thought, is not less pure in her daring, than she who, in her shyness, shrinks and blushes before every look. Nathalie was certainly not more vain than most handsome girls of her age; she was not less innocent in her southern vivacity of manner and freedom of speech, than the calm and reserved maidens of Normandy. At the same time, she might have subdued both, without any detriment to herself, and she probably would have done so, but for the harsh censure of Mademoiselle Dantin. The schoolmistress wished her to talk and laugh less, and broadly hinted at the impropriety of running up and down stairs with so much of the unnecessary liveliness displayed by Nathalie, who could scarcely go quietly across a room, or even more about, without seeming happier for the exertion. These ill-tempered remonstrances, joined to taunts of her southern origin, to which Mademoiselle Dantin charitably attributed her various failings, only irritated Nathalie, and strengthened her firm resolve not to be improved:

provincial patriotism, and the spirit of opposition both commanded resistance, and both were duly obeyed. But this rebellious spirit did not prevent Nathalie from having a certain fear of opinion — that tyrant of youth. Mademoiselle Dantin she did not mind: she knew her to be unjust, but she shrank from being thought bold or unfeminine by others; and it was the dread of this that made her feel somewhat anxious on this particular evening.

“What had she said?” was her internal soliloquy. “Was there much harm in it? Why in a sort of pique and wilful daring had she allowed herself to be led from one confession to another, until she had uttered so much Monsieur de Sainville had no business to hear? What was it to him, the berries she ate, the experiments she made, and the conclusions she drew? He, too, drew his own conclusions, evidently; all this mad talk would give him a delightful opinion of her: she bit her lip, and wished it had been her tongue. He looked rather grave; she was sure it was about her — he was thinking her a very forward, impertinent girl, and regretting that she had ever become his guest. Well, as to that, he need not trouble himself — she would go soon enough; for as to staying where she could not speak her mind freely, it was not to be thought of.”

This haughty decision closed the reflections of Nathalie, who, like most proud and haughty persons, always kept by her a convenient stock of little imaginary quarrels. She now perceived that the room was silent; for since her last remark no one had spoken. She sat back on the couch, one arm supporting her cheek, her brow clouded, her eyes fixed

on the floor, which her foot tapped with mingled impatience and irritation. Though Monsieur de Sainville had laid down the *Revue*, he did not think fit to speak. The Canoness knitted with her usual zeal; she occasionally looked up, as if thinking this silence awkward. She coughed, by way of opening the conversation; but this effort having failed, she relapsed into silence: her look, however, still sought her nephew, and wandering from him to Nathalie, rested at length on the young girl.

"*Mon Dieu!* how very strange," she exclaimed, in her sudden way, and laying down her knitting as she spoke; "I wonder I did not notice it before."

Both Nathalie and Monsieur de Sainville looked up.

"It is really extraordinary," she continued, "especially when one considers that there is no relationship. Do you think, Armand, the Montolieu were ever allied to the Sainvilles?"

"No," replied Monsieur de Sainville, with perfect gravity; "I do not think they were."

Nathalie coloured, and looked indignant; Aunt Radegonde, without intending it, humbled her. She knew too well that Montolieu was not a name likely to be allied to one of the first names of the province; and being thoroughly democratic in feeling, whatever she might be in theory, she proudly resented all social and aristocratic distinctions.

"Did you notice it, Petite?" resumed the Canoness; "did you see it, Armand? That was why her face seemed so familiar to me."

"See what, aunt?"

"Why the striking likeness of Mademoiselle Montolieu to our aunt Adelaide's portrait."

Nathalie started slightly, but she never changed her attitude to look round. The likeness had not passed unheeded by her. She knew that, in mere beauty, at least, the Provençal girl and the once great lady could have stood side by side: sisters in loveliness and grace. A half-mocking, half-triumphant smile trembled on her lips, and for a moment lit up her changing features. Oh! youth and beauty, whilst your delightful power is felt—and when will it cease?—well may the happy ones who possess you, smile at the unavailing barriers erected by man's jealous pride. Reconciled to herself and restored to good humour, Nathalie looked up half-curiously, half-shyly to hear what Monsieur de Sainville would say. He scanned her features narrowly, then looked at the portrait, eyed her once again, and smiled.

"Yes," said he slowly, "there is likeness."

There was nothing in the words beyond their plain meaning, but his look was indulgent and very kind; at least Nathalie thought so: she thought that as it rested on her, that look seemed to say: "My dear child, do not trouble yourself for any little heedless things you may have said: I shall not think the worse of you for an evening's nonsense. No doubt, you are eighteen; and may fancy yourself very wise; but, take my word for it, you are a child yet, and not much wiser than when you ate the berries."

Did he really mean this, or had she simply imagined it? Nathalie did not know, and felt puzzled. She consoled herself with the assurance, that it was a matter of no importance to her; that she really did not care. But though she repeated this to herself often enough, she did not lose the opportunity of



ascertaining the truth which offered itself to her on the following day.

She had been taking a long walk with the Canoness in the garden, and before going in, they had sat down in a recess of the box-wood hedge. It was a fine evening, mild and hazy, as Nathalie sat by the Canoness on the old stone bench, still warm with the heat of the sun, which was slowly passing away from the garden. She abandoned herself with a vague pleasure to the dreamy charm of the hour. On their left, embosomed amongst its dark evergreens, arose the grey old château, but it looked gay and airy, not sombre, in the mellow light, which softened the hues and outlines of everything on which it fell; on their right extended the second terrace, dark, lonely, and silent, save for the little fountain, which sent forth a low, plashing sound, — monotonous, yet soothing of the ear. Whilst listening to it, Nathalie reclined back in the seat, and watched the red sunlight gradually fading from the smooth lawn before her. Thence her glance wandered along the windings of one of the many paths around them, until it was arrested by a graceful statue of Diana, rising white and motionless in the cool green light of a distant recess. The fleet and stately huntress was represented in the act of seizing by its antlers a stag, overtaken in the chase. Whilst Nathalie gazed thoughtfully on this copy of a well-known antique, the evening breeze arose, and brought her from the neighbouring plantations the strong and penetrating odour of the pine-trees. Then, suddenly, the scene of a long-forgotten episode of her childhood recurred to her, and an involuntary smile flitted across her features.

"Petite," exclaimed the Canoness, "you are thinking of something pleasant or amusing; come, do not be selfish and keep it to yourself."

"Marraine," replied Nathalie, smiling again, and addressing her by the familiar appellation the Canoness had authorized, but which, in her pride, the young girl would not use before Monsieur de Sainville on the preceding evening; "Marraine, you will laugh, call me romantic, and chide."

"Never mind; — is it a second edition of the berries?"

"Almost; but first, tell me which of the heathen deities you prefer?"

"Really," candidly answered Aunt Radegonde, "I do not recollect ever thinking about them."

"What! not think of the nymphs, in their limpid streams and cool grottoes? Have you not one there sleeping for ever in her ivy couch? Not think of Flora, as fresh and pure as the first flowers of spring; of cheerful Pomona, with her basket ever full of ripe, sunny fruit; of green-haired Nereids, gliding along the glassy ocean; or magic Syrens, that haunt the rocks and depths of the sea, to lure away unwary mariners? And, above all, not think of Diana, that proud and virgin huntress of the deep woods of Greece? Oh! I have, as a child, thought of them all, of her especially; often, — ay, many a time; and this brings me to what you want to know. I could not help smiling awhile back, because, as I saw that distant statue, and as the wind rose, and the fragrance of the pine-trees came to us here, I remembered a summer morning I spent in a lonely wood a long time ago. I had intentionally strayed away

there, instead of going to school. It was not a very vast or romantic wood, but I easily converted it into a dark and solitary Thracian forest, sacred to the goddess. Bow and arrows I had none, but I hunted a few brown squirrels, who gaily leaped from bough to bough, and led me a weary chase. A little stream, a mere silver thread of water, ran through the wood: I sat down on its margin, and imagined it to be one of those deep fountains of icy chillness, near which Diana and her nymphs rested from the chase; at length, fairly overpowered with fatigue, I fell fast asleep, and thus I was found, brought home, scolded, and duly punished for my *escapade*, by the loss of all my holidays. This quite banished Diana and her life of solitary freedom from my thoughts, until just now, when the whole scene rose before me, as I looked at the statue, and I saw myself again a child in the wood, where, half-pleased, half-afraid, I started, and listened to every breeze which brought me, from some mysterious depths, the wild yet pleasing odour of the pine-tree."

Too indulgent to chide, and yet not quite able to sympathize with the romantic fancies of the Provençal girl, the Canoness coughed, and shook her head gently.

"Well," she said at length, "you were quite a child, — so there is not much harm in all this; besides, we are alone to-day, Petite."

Nathalie looked up, flushed, in a moment.

"Does that make any difference?" she asked, rather quickly.

But the Canoness had been meditating all day a homily on the young girl's *légèreté* and want of pru-

dent reserve, and she was quite determined that Nathalie should have the benefit of it now. It proved rather a tedious homily; but so gentle in spirit, and evidently so kindly meant, that Nathalie only smiled, and never dreamed of taking offence.

"You see, Petite," sententiously observed the Canoness, "there are certain secrets —"

"I have no secrets!" interrupted Nathalie.

"Oh! Petite."

"None, I assure you, and it is well for me; I labour, as you said just now, under an infirmity of speech; I cannot keep my tongue quiet when, as I feel, — alas! always too late, — I ought to do so. I do not like silence: it is unsociable, cheerless, — and if to talk be a sin —"

"It is a weakness, a feminine weakness, men say, — but never believe that, child; it is a vile calumny."

"I fear I am very weak, for I like it."

"How strange! I dislike talking."

"Alas! I do not," replied Nathalie, unable to repress an arch smile. "Not speak! why, there are times when I would sooner talk to the trees and bushes than remain silent. Knowing well this fatal indiscretion, I have made it a rule to have no secrets; there is really not one earthly thing I have to hide. May I not therefore talk without any other fear than that of annoying those who may chance to hear me?"

"Ay, Petite, and if we had been alone last evening; — there, you need not colour up so."

"But, Madame," objected Nathalie, somewhat proudly; "I do not think I said anything so very wrong, though I have no doubt it was indiscreet and foolish enough."

"True, Petite; but men have such peculiar ideas. In short, I feared you would injure yourself in the opinion of Monsieur de Sainville, who cannot have that deep insight into female character which I possess. So, to learn what he thought, as well as to remove any displeasing impression, I spoke to him this morning."

She paused and looked at Nathalie; the young girl's colour came and went, her head drooped slightly on her bosom, her eyes were fixed upon the earth, and the dark fringe of her eye-lashes rested almost on her cheek; she had plucked a twig of boxwood from the hedge, and was now pulling it slowly to pieces, leaf by leaf: she looked like a child at fault, and whom a word can make either penitent or rebellious.

"Well," continued the Canoness, "I spoke very delicately, of course, — so delicately, that at first he could not make out what I meant. 'Oh!' he said, at length, 'you are talking of Mademoiselle — what is her other name besides Montolieu — Nathalie — ay, Mademoiselle Nathalie. Well, aunt, what of her?' 'Why, Armand, I only wanted to explain to you, that being so young, gay, and pretty — 'pretty!' he interrupted, 'how do you know she is pretty? I looked at her last night, and she never kept the same face for five minutes at a time, and I think that her temper is not unlike her face.' You see, Petite, how he noticed about the knitting. Well, I made the best of it, and said I knew by my own experience, how to drop one's stitches would provoke a saint, and so on. He heard me to the end, smiled, and said, 'Be easy, aunt, there is no harm in the poor child.' But though

it is all right as yet, pray, Petite, be more prudent another time."

Nathalie did not answer, but her look was no longer fixed on the earth; she seemed little pleased, and more rebellious than penitent.

"And what do I care about Monsieur de Sainville, or his opinion of me?" said the silent but sufficiently expressive curl of her lip.

Aunt Radegonde perceived she had done more harm than good.

"Petite," she said, gravely, "I begin to think you are not easy to manage. I did not mean to tell you something; I see I must, to reconcile you to Armand, who meant well. What do you think he added, when he asked me how I knew that you were pretty?"

"Really, I cannot tell; something very flattering, no doubt. To have no harm in one comprises everything good, does it not?"

"Oh, no! He only said, 'She is more than pretty, aunt; she is charming.'"

Did the compliment soothe Nathalie's wounded pride? No trace of the feeling appeared, at least on her features.

"Why!" exclaimed the Canoness, somewhat surprised, "I thought you would feel flattered, Petite! Let me tell you that Armand is difficult to please, and that I have not heard him say so of any woman, since his return."

Still Nathalie did not reply. When she spoke at length, it was to say that the evening was very cool, and that she felt chilly.

Aunt Radegonde often declared that she had great experience and penetration, and, above all, that she

understood girls thoroughly; but, on this occasion, both acquired knowledge and native genius were at fault; and, whether Nathalie was pleased or not, piqued or flattered, was more than she could discover.

## CHAPTER XI.

A WEEK had passed away. Madame Marceau — or to give her the name which, notwithstanding her brother's tacit disapprobation, she persisted in assuming — Madame Marceau de Sainville — had prolonged her visit at the château de Jussac, and, to Nathalie's great satisfaction, did not seem inclined to return in haste.

The autumn, which now began, was the finest that had for many years been known in Normandy, and that week was one of uninterrupted fair weather. The sun rose and set with unclouded splendour; the mornings were clear and sunny; the days warm and bright; the evenings gorgeous and magnificent. As Monsieur de Sainville was now never at home in the day-time, Nathalie wandered about the garden and the grounds with unlimited freedom, and with a sense of enjoyment not marred or disturbed by the prospect of meeting her severe-looking host. In a few days, there was not a retired nook in the whole place that had not become as familiar to her as if she had been born and bred in Sainville. In the intoxication of her delightful freedom, she no longer read or worked; the autumn days were brief and few — she resolved to enjoy them to the utmost; she accordingly visited the solitary green-house in the morning, the cool retreat of the sleeping nymph at noon, and she lingered

by the pebbly bank of the little river at evening-time, when deeper shadows fell on the dark yet transparent stream, and the red sunshine slowly passed away from the hills beyond.

Notwithstanding these long walks, Nathalie spent the greater portion of her time with the Canoness. They sat together in the lime-tree avenue, and had endless conversations, which Nathalie, however, never seemed to find tedious; indeed, she proved so excellent and attentive a listener, that she greatly flattered the simple Canoness, and quite won her heart. They met Monsieur de Sainville at dinner, and he generally came to spend two or three hours in his aunt's boudoir in the course of the evening. To Nathalie, he was always strictly polite; yet, whether for his own peculiar gratification, or for the more praiseworthy purpose of trying the young girl's temper and patience, he seldom failed to vex or provoke her in some way or other before they parted. She retired to her room greatly offended, woke up somewhat mollified, and went down to breakfast on the following morning not exactly knowing how she ought to behave to Monsieur de Sainville. Without giving her time to reflect, he quietly settled the point, either by taking it as granted that nothing had occurred to disturb their mutual harmony, or by uttering some well-timed remark, which at once restored her to good humour. Nathalie thus learned practically, that if her host knew how to provoke feminine anger, he was not inexpert in the more difficult art of soothing it again. But though he succeeded in pacifying her, he could not remove the unfavourable impression thus produced — an impression which daily grew stronger in her mind against him.



All that Rose could urge, failed in satisfying Nathalie that her host behaved well towards her.

On the day fixed for Madame Marceau's return, the two sisters were seated together in the dull salon of Madame Lavigne, and discussing this subject somewhat warmly.

"Is he impertinent?" asked Rose.

"No, certainly he is not."

"Is he patronizing?"

"No; he may be proud enough of his name, wealth and station; but it is only fair to acknowledge that he never shows it."

"Then what does he do?"

"He treats me like a child, Rose; which I consider a very unwarrantable freedom."

Her sister could not repress a smile.

"Are you not a child?" she said.

"A child! Rose; that is too bad. I see you are just like him; but no, for you talk sensibly to me; he never condescends to do so. He scarcely speaks, yet makes me say things at which I afterwards bite my tongue. The other evening, on going up to my room, I thought what a strange man he was, and what strange things he had said; but on examining the matter, I found his most original remark was, that *ennui* was the serpent which tempted Eve. Yet with his provoking way of looking, half-smiling and putting careless questions, he had made me utter one folly after another. I resolved to be on my guard; but it was of no use, for the very next evening I allowed myself to be again provoked into the utterance of I know not how many foolish and impertinent things."

"You could not remain silent?"

"Not when I had begun; it was like a broken string of beads — whilst you try to fasten it at one end the beads slip off at the other. What vexes me most in this is, that he notices me at all. I am no child; indeed, I could understand him very well if he would only condescend to treat me like a sensible person, — I shall get angry if you smile so, Rose, — but no, though he can talk admirably, as I perceived yesterday, when some visitors came, it is not worth while addressing a foolish girl of eighteen in that strain."

"Nathalie," said her sister, very gravely, "there is a thing I cannot understand: you complain of Monsieur de Sainville, and yet you confessed awhile ago, you were delighted at the prospect of spending the winter at the château."

"Why, Rose, it is very plain," replied Nathalie, colouring; "I do not care about Monsieur de Sainville; that is why."

Rose eyed her sister seriously.

"How thoughtless you are," she said; "if your pride has already suffered in that house, will it not suffer still more? I wish you could have spent the winter here with me."

"Heaven forbid!" quickly exclaimed Nathalie, who coloured immediately at the fervour with which she had spoken.

"Yes," said Rose, looking round her with a thoughtful look and a mournful smile; "yes, you are young, gay, and this is a very dreary place. Yet, Nathalie, there are greater misfortunes than a dull home, a dull sister, and a cross aunt; and though it is useless, I wish you were farther away from a world, and from

persons a great deal too much above you for your happiness or your pride. How will you feel when you leave your present home for some school like *Maisie Dantins*?"

"Miserable, no doubt; but, Rose, why trouble my head about such things, when there is a winter, an age, before me? Why, before the spring comes round something will have turned up."

"What?" asked Rose.

"Oh, never mind what! something good, of course. Why, Rose, I am eighteen, — a gay heiress just entered into possession —"

"Of what?"

"Of hope, dear Rose, — Hope, the fairest lady eye ever saw; and rich — ay, with castles beyond number. Tell me not I am poor and friendless! Why there is wealth before me I shall never live to spend, and a friend looks at me from every face I meet. How can you think to cast me down on this lovely morning? Look at that warm sunshine which makes even this dull hole bright; at that bright blue sky beyond; why, even the old grey church tower looks gay and airy to-day."

Rose said nothing.

"I told you," continued her sister, "that I was an heiress; I mistook, Rose; — heiress! pshaw! I am queen; this world is my realm, my reign has just begun, and every joy of mine empire shall come and do me homage. God bless them all with their kind looks and pleasant voices; and what a long, endless train they look, Rose."

"Her head has been turned by romances," said Rose, laying down her work.

Nathalie laughed, and shook her head with joyous grace.

"As if I read romances now!" she said gaily. "What! read fiction with truth itself before me! I should be a child indeed! No, no, Rose; I have a wonderful romance of my own: — each day I turn over a new page, and at the bottom of none do I yet see written the dark word, — FINIS."

"You are happy; but for how long?"

"For ever. Who speaks of the sorrows of life? Strange, I feel an inability to suffer. Let those mope and mourn who will. I say this world is a gay place, and the journey through, as pleasant a path as ever was trod."

"And the nettles and the briars?"

"Nettles and briars must be plucked to sting; and touch them I will not whilst there are pleasant wayside flowers to gather. Rose, sorrow is of our own seeking. Some may like a taste of the bitter cup, by way of change, but I do not yet feel cloyed of sweetness. Oh! when one knows how to set about it, this life is a joyful thing."

"And what is it when youth is passed?" asked Rose, sadly. But her sister only smiled a bright, sunny smile that would not be dismayed.

"It is no use, Rose," she gaily said; "it is no use; it is like talking of next spring's troubles. I suppose youth must fade; the more is the pity, but I have years of it before me yet, and I will hoard up mine as a miser hoards his gold. I feel as if I could remain young for ever; why then should I get old? You will say others do; then I will be original, and strike out a path of my own. Oh! the glorious times of simple

faith, when travellers set forth to find the fountain of youth! But they might have stayed at home, Rose; for to keep a young heart is the only secret, and the fountain flows freely for all."

"And I verily believe," replied Rose, smiling, in spite of all her efforts to keep grave, "that you will drink of that fountain for ever."

"I told you so; and just in the same way shall I be rich, by making all I behold mine in enjoyment. People possess, that they may enjoy. I enjoy at once, without giving myself the trouble of possession. You may smile, Rose, but I assure you I am neither proud nor ambitious: the crumbs and mites that fall from my neighbour's table of happiness will do very well for me."

"You are a strange child," said Rose, again laying down her work to look more earnestly at her handsome sister, whose laughing eyes and animated colour made her look even more than usually handsome; "shrewd and wise," she continued, "even through all your folly and your foolish dreams."

"Do not touch my dreams," observed Nathalie, looking up quickly; "they have been my only consolation many a time. Oh! the hours I have spent in Mademoiselle Dantin's garden, under the old beech-tree, in the school, in my room, not reading novels, as you so sagely fancy, but dreaming — ay, to my heart's content. Why, of the waking visions which haunted me then, I can still remember some with all the vividness of reality, — the imaginary spots, the dreary deserts, the wild adventures, the perils, escapes, and sudden joys of a deliverance thrill through me still; they come back to me even now with the dull school-room where they had birth: the low mur-

muring hum of the pupils conning over their lessons, and the quick pattering of the winter rain against the window-panes."

"And where was the use of all this?" asked Rose, very coldly.

"To make me happy for a few hours," composedly answered Nathalie, "which was more than anything around me could have done."

Rose moved restlessly on her chair, and gave her sister a dreary look; when she spoke, her tone was almost ironical.

"I suppose," she said, "you call this imagination?"

"You may call it so if you like, Rose; it was happiness to me."

She spoke gently, but Rose did not seem mollified.

"Ay, happiness as real as that of Alnaschar."

Nathalie smiled wistfully.

"I love that story, Rose, and I believe every one loves it. We are all Alnaschars in our way, and there lies the charm of the old Arabian tale."

"But will you tell me what remained to you of your imaginary happiness?" persisted Rose.

"Not a basket of broken glass, but pleasant remembrances," replied Nathalie, who seemed to take a perverse pleasure in teasing her sister.

"Oh! if you only knew how pleasant and easy it is, Rose; the school-garden was not very fine, but I could convert it into anything. Why, an old moss-grown wall has made me as pensive as the most time-honoured ruins; a group of aspens has been to me as a whole forest, — a rivulet as a mighty river. We want from nature but the first few primitive notes: in us lies the true melody with its endless variations.

I remember an old château in Provence that was to me as a long poem. It stood on the lonely beach within view of the sea. It was very bare and dreary within — what mattered it to me? I hung the walls with soft damask and rarest tapestry. Divine statues looked down in silence from every niche, and imaginary pictures opened long vistas of beauty; clear skies, azure seas and wild woods, — everything was there. I filled the hall with the gayest company, a glorious company, that was of every land and all ages, that I could summon or dismiss at will. Rose, do not frown, do not look so severe — indeed, our world is too narrow. What avails it that we are born and have our being, if we must be shut up within so limited a sphere? Why may we not see and know those we could love and venerate. Alas! those that might have been everything to us too often belonged to some other age — they were gone before we had birth. Have you never felt cheated and betrayed out of your due, because that being remained perforce a stranger? Oh! affection should not be the creature of a day; the gates of death should not possess that mysterious power, — they should not be that awful barrier between the quick and the dead! Why is this. Rose? Are we such miserable creatures, so poor in heart, that there is only room for those around us, — for one little narrow circle!"

Her countenance, late so gay, was now grave, her look earnest and thoughtful, her face turned towards Rose, inquiringly; but her sister coldly answered:

"Your talk is too high-flown for me; I suppose you will fall in love with some dead hero, one day, and quarrel with Providence, because you cannot have

him. I wish you would confine your speech and feelings to reality."

"Reality, reality!" impatiently exclaimed Nathalie; "why reality is but the dregs of the cup, Rose; imagination is the clear red wine."

"The bubbling foam would have been a more appropriate emblem," said Rose, rather ironically.

Nathalie tapped her foot impatiently.

"You may say what you like, Rose," she warmly exclaimed, "but take imagination from life, and nothing remains. Oh! reality is too cold and cheerless a dame for me. I once saw an old ruin in the sunshine: the moss, the ivy, the gay yellow wall-flower peeped from every cranny; a bird was lining its nest in a hole, and green lizards, glittering like emeralds, came in and out and basked in the light: the sky was blue beyond, the sun shone very brightly. Rose, it was the gayest ruin you ever saw; just the sort of place that would give one lightness of heart, and a wish to sing. I passed by it a few days later: the sky was dark and dull — it had been raining. The wall-flowers were beaten about by the wind, the moss hung dripping against the old stones, the ivy clung to them like a dark pall, — bird, lizards, sunshine, all were gone, — reality was there alone. Now, Rose, if one can keep the sunshine of life for ever over that cold stony ruin, reality, — where is the harm?"

"Wait to see, until your first sorrow comes," said Rose, briefly.

"Rose, you are very unkind; you do all you can to depress me. I am endeavouring to show you some other way to happiness, besides that which lies through the miserably dull route you call reality. This room,



I suppose, is reality; Mademoiselle Dantin's horrid school-room was reality; but I tell you that my world is far more real, because it is far more beautiful. We need not see beauty to enjoy it, Rose; it is inward. A sunbeam, a sound, a word, a breath, awaken or create all that need be the soul's desire. I have had all sunny Italy in the deep blue sky of noonday; the plaintive murmur of the wind in the branches of a lonely pine has given me the dreary forests of the north, with their gigantic trees rising, dark and spectre-like, through the thick flakes of falling snow, as I once read of them in some old book of travels; a whole pastoral landscape, with valley, low hills, quiet homesteads, and homeward-going cattle, has risen before me, with the scent of the new-made hay at evening. Why the other morning, the low ripple of the little stream that runs at the bottom of the garden, brought me back the deep and hollow murmur of the sea, with its endless waves still breaking on the beach."

"Do you often go on in that way at the château?" inquired Rose.

"No, Rose; for I do not often feel as I feel to-day."

"Yes, I can see something has pleased you, and so you behold all *couleur de rose*: what is it?"

"I give you my word I do not know, Rose. But you are right; something must have pleased me; for, indeed, as you say, everything wears a most rosy hue. There surely never was so lovely an autumn morning: the air is soft, yet exquisitely transparent; the breeze is genial as a breeze of spring; that deep blue sky would almost do for Provence. Oh! Rose, I feel very

religious to-day; blessed be He who has given us all this life and joy!"

The window was open; Nathalie half-leaned out, her elbow resting on the window-sill, her cheek supported by the palm of her hand. The soft morning breeze played around her, and fanned her cheeks, whose deepened bloom bespoke some inward emotion; her eyes shone brightly, but with deep softness in all their fire; her lips were slightly parted, and her breath came fast. Rose thought that as she raised her hand to arrange her hair, it trembled slightly. She looked excited, but it was the excitement which soon subsides into languor. Her sister eyed her again, and, familiar as it was to her, she now wondered at the young girl's beauty.

"*Mon Dieu!* what is the matter with you to-day?" she slowly asked.

Nathalie only smiled.

"Has anything made you feel glad?"

"Nothing, that I know of. Is it a wonder that I should be gay? Then here comes one who will do all she can to check the mood."

The door opened as she spoke, and Madame Lavigne entered, supported by Désirée, who left immediately.

"Who was that talking?" sharply asked the blind woman, when Rose had helped her to her seat.

"Guess?" replied Nathalie.

"Oh! you. Your voice sounds cheerful to-day. What has pleased you?"

"Nothing, and there is the beauty of it. To be gay with good reason is no wonder; but what joy so

sweet as a nameless joy, — unless it be a nameless hope?"

The blind woman smiled her own sour smile.

"So you feel glad?" she said.

"So glad that you cannot put me out of temper."

"We shall see. How is the best friend?"

"Very well."

"Kind still?"

"Very kind."

"Have you quarrelled yet?"

"Quarrelled! No."

"Then he is very foolish."

Nathalie looked annoyed, but she scorned to reply.

"There!" triumphantly cried Madame Lavigne, "you are already vexed."

"No, I am not."

"Yes, you are; and, poor child! well you may be. What! have you been a whole fortnight in his house, and has he not given you an opportunity of showing your temper? Mademoiselle Dantin knew your worth better than that. I know you better than that: we quarrel every time we meet, for you are nothing, unless when you are teased."

"And how do you know I have not been teased?" quickly asked Nathalie.

"I knew I could make you confess it," said Madame Lavigne, maliciously.

"I have confessed nothing," cried Nathalie, colouring.

"Yes, you have," replied the blind woman, smiling bitterly; "your vanity could not resist the bait I laid out for it. Oh! I know girls, and their ways. But come, child, do not be too vain, because he notices

you a little; you amuse him just now, but when the novelty is worn off, why your best friend will not seem to know you are in the house."

"You cannot tell," said Nathalie, a little scornfully.

"Yes, I can; do I not know how these things go on? Why, child, do not be foolish; do not forget you are only his aunt's companion, after all."

As her aunt uttered this taunt, Rose looked at her sister. She could detect an expression of pain and wounded pride passing over the features of Nathalie, but it did not last; and when she spoke, her tone was composed and cool.

"Madame," she said, "you quite mistake Monsieur de Sainville; he is not capricious or selfish, as you seem to think — as such conduct would imply; he treats me, not as his aunt's companion, but as his guest."

"Capricious or selfish!" said Madame Lavigne. "Ah! I understand — a hint about Rose. So your best friend is not that. And what is your best friend like, child? Have you any objection to describe him to me?"

"None," unhesitatingly replied Nathalie. "He is good, just, and, though cold, kind. You now know him as well as I do."

"I do not like perfect characters," snappishly answered Madame Lavigne.

She looked sour and displeased, and refused to answer, save by a cool nod, to the cheerful adieu of Nathalie, who was now preparing to depart.

The young girl was turning towards the door, when it opened, and admitted no less a personage than Mademoiselle Dantin, accompanied by the Chevalier. Nathalie started, coloured, and then, in spite of all

her efforts, could scarcely keep grave. The schoolmistress closed the door, and eyed her former teacher with haughty majesty; the Chevalier looked both distressed and pleased; Rose remained calm; Madame Lavigne turned her head about, listened keenly, though not a word was spoken, and appeared to be conscious that something agreeable to her was at hand.

"What!" she exclaimed, rubbing her hands, "it is that good, that kind Mademoiselle Dantin come to pay us a visit; and the dear Chevalier, too. My dear little Nathalie, I hope you are not gone. Where are you, mignonne? Here is Mademoiselle Dantin, whom you are so fond of."

Mademoiselle Dantin coughed a short indignant cough, and looked daggers, first at her sightless friend, then at the Chevalier, who had respectfully approached the young girl. A smile trembled on Nathalie's lip; she tried to repress it, but in vain — the smile broke forth. Willing to make the best of an awkward position, she turned towards the schoolmistress, and said, frankly:

"Is there any reason why we should not be friends?"

Mademoiselle Dantin shot an angry glance at the Chevalier, then closed her eyes and gently inclined her head towards her left shoulder.

"Friends! she was in a state of friendship with the whole human race."

"I am willing to believe it," said Nathalie, a little impatiently; "though we did not part exactly as friends part. I believe, however, that you laboured under an honest mistake. If you were severe, I was, to say the

least, impatient; but surely this is no reason for mutual and very unavailing enmity."

"Enmity, Mademoiselle Montolieu!" exclaimed the schoolmistress, casting around her a look of astonishment; "I protest against the word; it is unnatural in this part of the country, though I have no doubt that in the unhappy south it is, alas! frequent enough."

The eyes of Nathalie lit up indignantly.

"You are unchanged," she said; "but you are right, quite right; — yes, in the south we hear of enmity, — but it is a breath, a word; here it is unspoken, to lie hidden in the heart."

Madame Lavigne laughed, and rubbed her hands with malicious glee.

"Fine day!" she said; "rather hot in this room, too! Will Mademoiselle Dantin and Mademoiselle Montolieu both stay and dine with a poor invalid?"

"Stay!" indignantly cried Nathalie; "stay in this room; no — not one second longer."

The Chevalier vainly began a speech about amiable ladies and the gentleness of the sex. The schoolmistress gave him a scornful glance; Nathalie had turned away, and the door had flown open and again closed upon her. She had reached the door below, and was vainly endeavouring to unlock it, when a hand arrested her. She turned round; it was Rose, looking grave and severe.

"Come in here," said she, pointing to a small and gloomy parlour, of which the door stood half-open. Nathalie complied, docile and subdued in an instant.

"Well, Rose," she hesitatingly said, "I know you are not pleased; but could I help it? Surely it was spiteful of her to speak so about the south."

"That was no reason why you should give way to your temper."

"But, Rose, I cannot bear it. Do you think," she added, whilst the pride of race deepened the colour on her cheek, "do you think I have forgotten that these litigious Normans are descended from the savage barbarians of the north, whilst we are the children of Greece and Rome?"

"Try and speak sensibly, child," said Rose, shrugging her shoulders; "and pray remember that your sister is a genuine and cool Normande."

"You, Rose," exclaimed Nathalie, whilst her eyes glistened; "Oh! you are of those that belong to no race and no clime: you are a saint, — an angel upon earth."

"Angel as I am," decisively said Rose, "I am going to scold you."

"Scold! Rose; I will hear you patiently. Be just, and acknowledge that I have never yet quarrelled with you, or what you said."

"No, my poor child," replied Rose, who seemed a little moved, "and yet I have been severe; you are right: you have been patient."

"Because I love, I revere you, Rose," cried Nathalie eagerly, and pressing her sister's hands as she spoke; "when I love I can be patient, I can endure; but from such beings as Mademoiselle Dantin, or your cross old aunt, — never."

"Ay, and nothing would content you this morning but to tease my aunt."

"I merely refused to gratify her ill-nature, by speaking ill of Monsieur de Sainville."

"Do you think of him all you said?" gravely asked Rose.

The two sisters still stood in the little parlour, Nathalie with her back to the narrow window, whence a pale light descended on the calm features of Rose, who detected, nevertheless, the deepening colour on her sister's cheek.

"If I say that I spoke so for the praiseworthy purpose of vexing your aunt, you will look grave, Rose, will you not?" she at length replied.

Rose did look very grave.

"I do not understand this trifling, Nathalie; indeed I do not," she said, very seriously. "Oh! if you would only promise me to be prudent!"

"Ask something I can promise, Rose; that is impossible, for it is not in my nature to fear; and prudence is only fear, with a wise cloak on."

"Then promise me to remember a very wise thing you said up-stairs."

"A wise thing! Did you say a wise thing, Rose? Oh! for the wonder of having said a wise thing, I will promise anything. What was it?"

"That sorrow was of our own seeking," gravely answered her sister.

"Did I really say that?" inquired Nathalie, looking a little thoughtful; "and was that a wise thing?"

"A true one, at least."

"Well, then, Rose, I shall keep to this wisdom, and dutifully avoid all sorrow. I suppose this is your meaning — the best means of accomplishing which is to take all the happiness this world of ours can afford me."



Rose shook her head, and sighed.

"Rose," said her sister, "you are devout, but verily I have more faith than you have. I believe in happiness, little as I have known of it; I believe in it with my whole soul — ay, with my whole heart," she added, pressing both her hands to her bosom.

"And I also believe in happiness," answered Rose, in a low tone; "but oh! sister, not in the vain, dreary happiness of this world."

She, too, had clasped her hands, but as they are clasped in prayer. When her look met that of her sister, it implied fervent faith — the faith of all that the soul can hope of joy hereafter; even as in the clear look of the younger girl might be read the delightful hopes and divine promises which the earthly future still holds out to the ardent and impassioned soul of youth.

As Rose gazed on that radiant face, she felt, perhaps, how unavailing it was to pour forth the fears and doubts of her maturer years into the ear of a being still so rich in the wealth of her golden youth. She sighed, but spoke no more, and merely laid her thin hand on the young girl's shoulder, and pressed her pale lips on her clear brow in token of adieu.

They parted. As she turned the angle of the court, Nathalie looked round, and smiled again at her grave sister, who, after lingering awhile on the threshold, was silently closing on herself the door of her gloomy home.

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## CHAPTER XII.

ON entering the drawing-room, Nathalie, who had expected to find only the Canoness, was somewhat disconcerted to perceive Madame Marceau, and a lady, in whom she recognized Madame de Jussac. After a moment of hesitation she came forward, for, though their presence was anything but agreeable to her, pride would not allow her to draw back or look disconcerted.

Madame Marceau held out her hand with smiling welcome, and protested that Mademoiselle Montolieu looked charmingly. This was addressed to the lady by her side, who, by acquiescing, showed that she knew who Mademoiselle Montolieu was; they had met at Mademoiselle Dantin's school, where, with little regard to the ceremonial of rank or wealth, Madame de Jussac had once left her daughters during a temporary absence at Paris.

Madame de Jussac was a fair and aristocratic lady of middle age. She had been handsome, and was handsome still, — but of a pale and tranquil sort of beauty, that contrasted strikingly with the dark and anxious face of her friend. She seldom spoke, yet no one thought her silent. When Madame Marceau addressed her, she answered with a gentle inclination of the head, a quiet smile that displayed her ivory teeth, or a slow look of her soft blue eyes, and all this was quite as significant as the other lady's full and stately speech. She seemed as averse to unnecessary motion as to superfluous discourse; once she had fairly settled herself on a couch or sofa, she did not care to leave it, but reclined there for hours, in

an attitude of repose that was not without a certain indolent grace. Her chief occupation seemed to be to fan herself slowly during the heat of the day. This first day of her sojourn at Sainville — for she had come to stay a week — appeared very dull to Nathalie. Aunt Radegonde had retired to her room with a bad headache, and the young girl kept as much as possible out of the way of the two ladies. After dinner, which was unusually early, and at which Monsieur de Sainville, being away, did not appear, Nathalie retired to the deep recess of one of the drawing-room windows, and sat there alone, shrouded from observation by the crimson curtain. The ladies spoke in a subdued tone; but even had their discourse been louder, Nathalie would not have heeded it. She worked at her embroidery, and occasionally put it down to watch the darkening and stormy-looking sky. When the sun set in the west, a sudden and lurid light spread over the whole landscape, and threw its flame-like glow over the sere foliage of the avenue, and the road and landscape beyond. It was at this moment that the door opened, and Amanda entered. At first Nathalie paid no attention to what she said; but she suddenly became attentive; it was Madame Marceau who was speaking.

"Who could have thought our quiet little river would ever act so?" she said, in a tone of calm concern. "An inundation! I am truly sorry for those poor people. Will they lose all their crops? But what has Monsieur de Sainville to do with this, Amanda?"

"He is in the boat, Madame."

"In the boat!" exclaimed Madame Marceau, with



udden alarm. "Good heavens! what has he to do with the boat! Surely those people could save their crops without Monsieur de Sainville risking his life!"

"I believe I may assure Madame, there is no danger whatever. But the place is so lonely that there was only one man at home; the rest were out far away in the fields; and Monsieur de Sainville, perceiving there was no time to lose, very kindly offered his aid."

"I am astonished!" impatiently said Madame Marceau; "surely, my brother might have made their loss good to those people; a few stacks of corn can never be worth all the trouble he is taking. Is it far up the river? Can we see anything from the end of the garden, I wonder? *Ma bonne*, shall we go and try to look on?"

Madame de Jussac languidly assented. There was a rustling sound of silken robes; then a door closed softly, and all was still. Nathalie emerged from her retreat. Amanda, who had lingered behind the two ladies, uttered a faint scream.

"I beg Mademoiselle's pardon," she said, recovering at once, "but I did not know Mademoiselle was there; and when she came out, looking so pale and frightened —"

"What is it? Are you sure there is no danger? What is Monsieur de Sainville doing in that boat? How did all this happen?"

The young girl spoke in a brief, almost imperative tone. Amanda eyed her with slight surprise, but composedly replied that the river had suddenly overflowed its banks at some distance up the stream, and carried away the stacks of corn belonging to the poor

cottagers who lived by the river-side. Monsieur de Sainville was riding by at the time of the accident; perceiving the necessity of prompt assistance he had immediately dismounted and offered his aid.

"And how do you know this?" asked Nathalie.

"I met a woman who was going to Sainville to fetch assistance, and send up another boat."

"A nice messenger! To lose her time in telling you all this, instead of going on at once," impatiently exclaimed the young girl.

She took her scarf, lying on a chair, as she spoke, and quickly went down to the garden.

She found Madame Marceau and her friend standing by the water-side, at the end of the third terrace. She drew near. A bend in the river allowed the eye to look up the stream for a considerable distance. It was the opposite bank, which was much lower than that on which the château stood, that had suffered. The fields, which Nathalie had seen that very morning fresh and green, were now covered with a rolling sheet of dark and heavy water, over which lowered a leaden and sullen-looking sky; in the distance she perceived a few dark spots rising above the stream, — these were stacks of corn. Her heart ached, as she remembered how, a few days before, she had spent a whole afternoon, sitting in the high grass, at the foot of a tree, watching the reapers 'midst the yellow corn, and listening to their far and joyous singing. A black speck appeared in the distance — it was the boat crossing over to the submerged bank; in the taller of the two rowers, Nathalie thought she could recognize Monsieur de Sainville; she felt sure that it was he, when he rose for a moment, and the outline of his

figure appeared dark and distinct on the grey sky. The boat approached the nearest stack — then there was a pause, which seemed to Nathalie as if it would never end; at last the boat moved once more, but it moved slowly, for it was heavily laden; once, in the very middle of the stream, it stood quite still, and the water looked so dark and threatening, as it rushed by, its swollen tide crested with a thin white foam, that Nathalie turned pale, and felt as if her heart ceased to beat; but the rowers were only pausing for rest — the boat soon moved again; — in a few minutes, it had safely reached the shore.

Nathalie gave a sigh of relief, and looked at Madame Marceau, who stood watching all, through her opera-glass. She lowered it, and said, very calmly:

“A similar thing occurred last year, I believe. Those people might really have been more careful. Armand is so prudent and courageous, that I do not fear for him; I have besides been given to understand that the water never rises above a certain height.”

“Indeed!” said Madame de Jussac, with a slight yawn, and looking as if she longed to be back again on the easy drawing-room sofa.

Nathalie beheld with astonishment their well-bred ease and indifference. Anything resembling a deed to do, an adventure to accomplish, a peril to brave, even though she could only be a passive looker-on, sent the blood to her heart in a more rapid tide, and made her whole frame thrill with excitement. The cries and lamentations of the women and children, which the wind brought down distinctly to her ear; the sight of that frail boat gliding over the heaving

and swollen river; of the dark sky above, heavy with threatening clouds; of the corn, now loosened from the stacks, and carried down by the rapid stream; the thought of the impending ruin of so many families, of the risk run to save their little property, of the courage displayed in thus seeking danger, and holding life so cheap, when there was an aim in view, so moved and roused her, that she could not refrain from clapping her hands when a boat from Sainville, with eager and bending rowers, cheering as they went, shot past, like an arrow, on its way to the scene of destruction.

"How cool it is!" said Madame de Jussac, with a slight shiver.

"I think we shall have a storm, too," observed Madame Marceau.

And, with mutual and tacit consent, the two ladies turned homewards. Nathalie never perceived their departure. She stood on the very brink of the water, half-bending forward, her hand shading her eyes, her look eagerly following the boat, which soon joined the other.

The task now proceeded rapidly. The two boats rivalled in promptitude and zeal; they crossed and recrossed the water, now heavily laden, now light and empty. At length there came a lull; all that could be rescued of the corn seemed to be stowed in safety; the waters over the flooded fields flowed in a dark and even tide, with here and there a wandering sheaf, tossed by an eddy of the stream. One of the boats remained, to save all that still floated on the surface; the other slowly came down the stream, towards the spot where Nathalie stood, watching its

progress. It neared the bank; stopped by a convenient landing-place; Monsieur de Sainville leaped out; thanked the man, who touched his cap, and rowed back to the spot whence he had come.

As her host evidently did not see her, it would have been more proper and discreet for Nathalie to retire than to remain. But she was inquisitive and *naïve* in her curiosity, like a true southern, and therefore stayed until Monsieur de Sainville came up to her. He could not repress a slight exclamation of wonder on seeing her there, standing by the water's edge, with her light dress fluttering in the wind, and her anxious face eagerly turned towards him. She mistook his brief ejaculation for one of pain, and, stepping forward, said quickly:

"Are you hurt, Sir?"

"Hurt! No," he replied, with increased surprise; and his scrutinizing look said, "What are you doing here?"

She did not heed it; but continued:

"Is the corn all safe, Sir?"

"Almost all."

"And was there no accident?"

"None whatever."

"But how tired you must feel!"

"No, thank you," he quietly replied. "I was formerly fond of rowing, and have not lost the habit yet."

"But this was a very dangerous task, was it not?" continued Nathalie.

"Not in the least," he answered, with a smile.

"But allow me to say, you did wrong to linger here on this dark evening."



Nathalie looked round; she saw that the two ladies, whom she had quite forgotten, were gone. Behind and around her stretched a gloomy and threatening sky, which seemed more gloomy still, as it lay reflected, with its mass of clouds, in the dark and sullen waters of the swollen river. She turned quietly towards Monsieur de Sainville, and said simply:

"I never heard them going."

"Then my sister and Madame de Jussac were here. Why did you remain behind? Did you not see the storm coming fast?"

"No; I was looking at the boats, and never thought of the sky."

"Nor of the rain," said he, looking down at the large drops which had already stained the stone steps on which they stood; for they had turned homewards whilst speaking thus, and were going up to the second terrace.

"Do you think it will thunder?" asked Nathalie, who preceded him, and now turned round with sudden alarm.

Before he could reply, a flash of lightning crossed the sky behind her; she only saw it by the lurid light which passed over the grave features of Monsieur de Sainville; but she turned very pale, and trembled from head to foot, when the peal of thunder followed in rapid succession.

"You are afraid of thunder," he said, with some surprise.

"Very much," she replied; and her pale lips and chattering teeth showed there was no affection in the fear.

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He gave a quick look around him; the rain was falling fast: the sky was deepening in gloom.

"It is useless to think of reaching the house," he decisively observed; "will you have the goodness to come this way?"

He went down the steps as he spoke; the stone was already wet and slippery. He held out his hand to her; she took it, and followed him with silent docility: but when she saw him entering the grounds, she could not help saying,

"Where are we going, Sir?"

"To the pavilion," he quietly replied.

This pavilion was only a little rotunda, or summer-house of rustic work. The roof was thatched, and the walls were made of young larch-trees, with the bark on. It stood in a lonely spot, surrounded by large and wide-spreading beeches. Aunt Radegonde had one day pointed it out to Nathalie as Armand's favourite retreat; "he comes there for several hours every day to smoke," she said; "for he is kind and considerate, and knows how I hate the smell of either pipe or cigar about the house." The rain poured down in torrents; this was no time to remonstrate or object: Nathalie did neither, but walked quickly with Monsieur de Sainville along a shady and covered path. In a few minutes they had reached the place; he raised the latch, she entered, he followed her in, and closed the door behind him. Scarcely were they within, when the storm burst forth in all its fury; flash followed flash, and peal was heard upon peal. Nathalie hid her face in her hands, and now and then looked up with a frightened start; whilst Monsieur de Sainville calmly assured her that there was little or no danger,

that the storm was not so nigh as she thought, and that the lightning was much more likely to be attracted by some of the tall trees, than by their little thatched refuge. The young girl endeavoured to seem attentive, but she evidently heeded more the thunder than his arguments; and at length, he could not help asking her again, how she had remained behind, being so much afraid of the storm as she was.

"Because I never thought about it," she quietly replied.

As the storm lessened, Nathalie, feeling somewhat ashamed of her timidity, assumed a composed air, and glanced around her with a look half-shy and half-curious. The retreat of Monsieur de Sainville was not encumbered with needless furniture, for there were only two chairs, a small buffet, and a round table fixed in the centre of the room, all of rustic work. At one end of the room stood a low chimney, framed in iron; over it were suspended large pipes of peculiar shape, and a gleaming blade half-drawn from its scabbard. Facing the chimney was a little arched window, opening a gloomy vista into winding alleys, close thickets, and groups of bushes of the melancholy-looking pine-tree now seen through a veil of white and heavy rain, and by the pale light of rapid lightning flashes.

Nathalie felt her heart beating with something between pleasure and fear. As she listened to the vague and moaning sounds of the storm without, and looked on that wild prospect, half-wrapped in mysterious gloom, she fancied herself a belated traveller, lost in some primeval forest solitude. Monsieur de Sainville fell into her mood, by observing:

"Mademoiselle Nathalie, I hope you like my her-



mitage. Pray please your romantic fancy for me; imagine me the sober hermit, yourself the damsel of old, reaching this solitary refuge, after many perilous wanderings. You must be wet and cold, — will you not warm yourself, whilst I produce my hermit's fare?"

She turned round; a wood fire was kindling on the hearth with a crackling sound: he drew a chair for her. She sat down by the fire, for she felt chilly; in the meanwhile he opened the buffet, and drew forth a glass, a flask of wine, and a small wheaten loaf, all of which he placed on the table before her.

"Real hermit's fare," he said; "though I rather suspect hermits drank water; but not happening to have a limpid stream — are not those the words? — running past my door, I must needs be content with wine, and have nothing better to offer to an unprotected guest."

He poured out some wine as he spoke; she thanked him, but did not touch it; she was bending over the fire, and looked cold and pale; he eyed her uneasily, said she would certainly take cold, and urged her to throw off her wet scarf and dry her feet. There was something of kindly imperativeness in his manner; she complied, with silent docility, and took off both scarf and slippers. Her host helped her to shake the first; then, as she knelt on the hearth, and held it to the fire, he took up one of her slippers and also held it close to the heat, so that it might dry more quickly. Nathalie looked at him in silent wonder. "*Mon Dieu!*" she thought, "what would Madame Marceau say, if she could see her brother drying my slippers?"

In her simplicity, the young girl thought that she had wronged Monsieur de Sainville — that he was not

so proud as she had once imagined him to be. In reality, he was much more so. Besides the personal pride she had justly attributed to him, her host had the pride of his race and birth in the highest degree. He was proud of his station, to which he never alluded — of his ancestors, whom he had too much good taste ever to mention — of all, in short, that had made him Armand de Sainville. But the pride of the old French noblesse has always gone hand in hand with a chivalrous courtesy of manner that distinguishes them still. Nathalie need have felt no surprise on seeing her host thus philosophically attending on her; he belonged to that race of *gentilhommes* whose most aristocratic monarch, Louis XIV, bared his head and bowed low to the poorest peasant girl who ever crossed his path.

Whilst drying the young girl's *pantoufle*, Monsieur de Sainville eyed it somewhat curiously. Nathalie, like a true Frenchwoman, though simple to an excess in her dress, was very fastidious about her *chaussure*. The slipper which he held was merely of black satin, but so small, so quaintly cut, and so coquettish, that, though not made of glass, it might have rivalled the famous *pantoufle* of Cinderella. He could not repress a smile, as he looked at it, and turned it round on his hand, like some childish thing. With good-humoured reproof, he asked Nathalie if she seriously thought such flimsy little things could be of any possible use? She looked rather indignant, on hearing her favourite slippers thus maligned, and quickly replied, that, though so slight, they were very good and very strong; upon which, he shook his head, and looked sceptical.

The scarf soon dried, and so did the slippers; Nathalie quietly put them on, unseen, as she thought, by Monsieur de Sainville, who stood at one angle of the fire-place, looking down abstractedly at the burning embers on the hearth. As she rose, her hair, heavy with rain, fell down in dishevelled tresses; she was impatiently fastening it up again, damp as it was, when he quietly observed:

"Do let your hair dry, Mademoiselle Nathalie; it is quite wet."

"He sees everything," pettishly thought the young girl; but she silently complied, and once more knelt down facing him. He seemed abstracted; she wondered what he could be thinking about and in wondering looked; the result of which was that he immediately caught her eye, and seeing her slightly confused, asked which of the pipes had attracted her attention.

"This is a very peculiar-looking one," evasively replied Nathalie, too frank to like or freely accept an excuse.

"This is not a pipe," said he taking it down as he spoke, "but a pistol."

She started up in alarm; he smiled and assured her there was no danger; but Nathalie looked sceptical and uneasy; she had a vague suspicion that pistols were always loaded, and always on the point of going off. Ashamed of the fear she had betrayed, she knelt once more, but could not help thinking that Monsieur de Sainville must be a strange suspicious man, to have those deadly weapons around him even in that quiet summer-house.

"It is a travelling habit I have taken," he calmly

said; "I assure you it gives a peculiar sense of security and independence. With just that little instrument in my hand" — he handled it as he spoke — "though not half so formidable looking as yonder pipe, it will go hard indeed if I do not remain my own master. The law is a good thing; the police is useful, watchful servants are beyond praise, but that which enables a man to do without them all is better far."

He replaced the pistol as he spoke; then perceiving Nathalie's glass still full, he urged her to take some of the wine he had poured out for her.

"You will like it," he quietly observed.

She raised the glass to her lips, then quickly laid it down and looked at her host; he was smiling and seemed to enjoy her surprise.

"But this is a Provençal wine," she said with some emotion; "the ciotat muscat, which I never tasted since I came to Normandy."

"Yes, it is the ciotat; I had some at Arles, and liked it so well that I ordered a certain quantity of it when I came here."

"Arles! You have been at Arles?" exclaimed the young girl eagerly looking at him, and eyeing him from head to foot, as if the mere fact of having been at Arles must have produced some change in his person.

"Yes, indeed, I have; I was coming from Beaucaire."

"Beaucaire!" she interrupted. "You have been at Beaucaire, also? Did you see the great fair?"

"I went there for that purpose, four years ago."

"*Mon Dieu!* that was the very time I went with my poor aunt. How strange we did not meet?"

"Yes," he said, very seriously; "it is peculiar."

"Was it not a fine fair? How gay the narrow streets looked with the signs of blue, red, and yellow cloth crossing from one side to the other, and the white linen awning over all! And then the rich goods displayed at every door! Carpets, costly arms, rich silks, and jewels in heaps, — yes, everything was there. My aunt told me some of the merchants had travelled hundreds of miles to exhibit and sell their goods. I believe they were of every nation under the sun. I saw Italians, Spaniards, and Germans, too, amongst the Europeans; but I looked most at the Turks, who seemed so solemn; the Armenians, who had such wily faces; and the Greeks, who were so handsome! Did you see them? My aunt said it was the finest fair that had ever been at Beaucaire; and though we only came for a few days we remained the whole of the first week."

"So did I," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Then I am quite sure we must have met," exclaimed Nathalie, looking delighted; "of course, we did not know one another, — I was much shorter than I am now, — but still we met at that fair of Beaucaire."

She spoke as if they were old acquaintances, and, indeed, nothing now could have convinced her that they were not so. She had spent a week at Beaucaire, four years ago, so had he; — the town was small, her walks had been confined to the principal streets, so must his have been; — it was evident they had met, — and if they had met, how could they be



strangers? From that hour the date of their acquaintanceship retrograded four years. He adopted the same logical reasoning, for he said with a smile, —

"We certainly did meet; indeed, I seem to recollect noticing a young girl, of fourteen or so, on the boat that took me to Arles; and she was decidedly like you," he added, looking at her fixedly.

"Was she with an old lady?" demurely asked Nathalie.

"Precisely, — with an old lady."

"And had she white muslin on?"

"I really think she had."

"How strange!" said Nathalie, seeming much amused.

"I see nothing strange in it," he replied, quite gravely; "we were at the fair together, and went home by the same boat, — it was perfectly natural."

"Yes, it would be, if it did not so happen that I never went home by the boat at all;" replied Nathalie, looking very merry and mischievous.

Monsieur de Sainville looked slightly disconcerted. He was a grave man, unacquainted with girls; he had certainly never expected that any young girl would carry her audacity so far as to make game of him to his very face. He frowned slightly, and looked down at her with a displeased mien, — but though her colour rose a little, her look still fearlessly met his. He could not help smiling, and saying in a good-humoured tone, that he must have been deceived by a casual likeness.

"How did you like Beaucaire, Sir?" Nathalie hastened to ask; for she was not quite sure she had not gone too far, and wished to change the subject.

"Not half so well as Arles."

"Then you liked Arles?" she exclaimed, looking at him a little wistfully, whilst something tremulous was in her tone as she uttered the name of her native and much-loved city.

"Who would not like that venerable old place, with its mighty ruins, some of them so fresh that it seems as if the Romans had left them but yesterday! With its women, whose strange beauty is like to none other; for they have a charm between eastern fire and classic grace, and when they seem most calm there is still something of southern passion in their look and in their mien."

Oh! subtle and exquisite indeed is the flattery of the land and race we love! Nathalie felt its power in the deepest recesses of her heart. Even as Monsieur de Sainville spoke, a bright vision slowly rose before her on the dark wall of the little hermitage: she beheld the broad Rhone gliding swiftly at the foot of a dark and ancient city, crowned with Roman ruins, and rising in the warm sunlight against the deep blue southern sky. She beheld it, and looked until her eyes became dimmed with tears. Then the vision faded away; she saw once more the dark night without; within, the fire-lit hermitage, and Monsieur de Sainville standing before her and looking down at her very kindly.

"I have grieved you," he said.

"Oh! no, Sir. You have made me feel so happy! Not since I left Arles have I met any one who had seen it, or cared to hear about it."

"Poor child!" he compassionately said; "the change

must have been great indeed, from Provence to Normandy."

"The home sickness was on me for a whole year. I could not sleep, and scarcely eat. The doctor said I must go back to the south, or die; but he was mistaken, for, with the blessing of God, I got better."

Monsieur de Sainville was not given to questioning; but he now seemed in the interrogative mood, for he made many inquiries concerning the life Nathalie led at Mademoiselle Dantin's. Her heart was opened, since she felt they had met at the fair of Beaucaire, and she answered freely. A few graphic, but not resentful, touches sketched Mademoiselle Dantin; the little Chevalier was not forgotten. She also spoke of her favourite pupils; of the grief it was to part from them; of her lonely walks in the garden; of the dreaming hours spent in her solitary room; and in all she said, there was girlish piquancy, blending with a simple and homely grace. He listened to her, with an occasional smile, that showed he always remained attentive, and yet with a sort of abstraction in his manner that rendered it very difficult to say how far he really cared for the ready replies his questions found, — how much he was guided by politeness, and how much by interest.

"Your life must have been dull at that school," he said, at length. "Did you never go to parties of pleasure, — to balls, or anything of the kind?"

"I went to five balls," she replied, with the prompt and accurate memory of one whose pleasures had been few and far between.

"Do you care about dancing?"

She eyed him wonderingly. Did she care about

! Well, those serious gentlemen, who cared about nothing themselves, did ask strange questions.

"Yes," she answered, "she liked it very much."

"Better than that Provençal ciotat?" said he, looking at her glass.

Nathalie drank the wine; but when she laid down her empty glass on the table, she remembered that Monsieur de Sainville had tasted nothing. The buffet was open; her eye ran hastily over it; there was no second glass, for she was the first guest he had received in his hermitage, and to whom he had dispensed hospitality.

"Oh! Sir," she said, rather pained, "you needed that wine, after your fatigue, much more than I did. You look pale and tired; I am sure you needed it."

He smiled at her earnest tone; said that he would borrow her glass; and poured himself out some wine. He then reclined back in his chair, and drank slowly, looking at her all the time.

"There are no wines like the southern wines," he said, pausing once; "so light and genial."

She shook her head in a shrewd way, that implied "I believe so;" and said aloud, "Oh! no; there are none like them."

"And I think," he resumed, at the next pause, "that this Provençal ciotat surpasses every other southern vintage."

"Do you really think so?" exclaimed Nathalie, looking delighted; "or does it only amuse you to see how foolish I can be about my poor Provence?" she added, a little doubtfully.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said he, quickly, "you are uncharitable. I give you my word that I think

everything from Provence both excellent and delightful."

He half-bent forward as he spoke, and there was such unusual warmth in his look and tone, that Nathalie blushed deeply, not knowing whether he did not mean a compliment. On reflection, she thought this very unlikely, and said, a little archly:

"The ciotat, especially."

"Yes, of course, the ciotat," he replied, laying down his empty glass, and looking rather abstracted.

"Then why not take more?" she urged; "you must be so fatigued!"

"You seem quite confident about that."

"I know it was a fatiguing and dangerous task."

"Upon my word, there was no danger."

"What, none at all?" said Nathalie, looking disappointed.

"To please you, I will admit there was a little. You evidently like the perilous."

"I like everything resembling an adventure," she candidly replied; "everything unlike the routine of dull, every-day life. I liked the distant danger on which I looked with a beating heart; the storm itself I liked, even when I feared it most. I like being here to-night, in this spot, looking so wild and solitary that one might fancy it lying miles away from a human dwelling. I like to sit here and watch those gloomy beeches, shedding their solemn twilight around, — to wonder, and half-shudder, at the mysterious depths beyond; and when I am most afraid, to contrast the darkness of the night without, with the warmth and cheerful light within."

She half-bent over the fire as she spoke thus, with evident enjoyment of her position. The wood burned brightly on the hearth; the night looked dark beyond, but the flame lit everything around with its flickering yet vivid glow. A warm ray illumed the grave features of Monsieur de Sainville, as he sat on one side of the fire-place, his elbow resting on the low mantel-shelf, and fell on the animated face, and bending profile of the young girl who sat opposite to him. The thunder and lightning had long ceased; but the rain still fell heavily, and the wind moaned away, with a low and lamentable sound, along the lonely avenues. There was a brief silence.

"Yes, this is indeed a solitary place," said Nathalie, speaking almost under her breath.

"Do you like solitude?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"I should not like to be alone here," was the frank reply.

"Indeed solitude is too quiet and silent a lady for you, my child," said he kindly.

"*Mon enfant*," though by no means implying the same degree of familiarity as the English expression of "my child," is still significant of an affectionate freedom Nathalie had not expected from Monsieur de Sainville; but their acquaintance had made great progress that evening. She could not help thinking so, and looking at him a little thoughtfully. He did not notice it; for he had risen, and stood near the window, listening to the rain and wind without.

"It is scarcely raining now," he said, after a pause. "I think, Mademoiselle Nathalie, it will be best for me to go alone to the château, and send a servant

to you, with a cloak, and anything else you may need."

Nathalie did not object, but she saw Monsieur de Sainville prepare to leave her with anything but a sense of security. This lonely spot, with its wild look-out, and the deepening gloom of night gathering around it, frightened her, — she knew not why. Still she did not like to remonstrate; but scarcely had the door closed upon him, than fear overcame shame; she left her seat, ran quickly to the door, opened it, and said, eagerly:

"I would much sooner not wait, Sir; — I would much rather go with you."

"I warn you," said he, coming back, "that it will be perhaps more of an adventure than even you will like; I have already perceived several newly-born islands and various unknown seas."

Nathalie bent forward, and cautiously put out her graceful head, for the rain had not quite ceased. The prospect was by no means cheering. Evening had set in; over a wide lawn, covered with pools of water, extended a grey and gloomy sky, in which the pale moon now shone with a dim and troubled light; between earth and heaven floated a thin white mist, which made the château, already at a sufficient distance, seem more distant still. Nathalie uttered an exclamation of dismay. He urged her not to make the attempt. She put one foot forward, took a step, and then hesitated. He thought she agreed to stay, and walked on; but she hastily descended the wooden steps, and quickly stood by his side.

"I cannot stay there alone," she said.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of the wind, of the rain, — of everything."

He smiled, but forbore to remonstrate. He helped her to throw her scarf over her head, gave a dubious glance, which she detected, at the satin slippers, and offered her his arm. The wind was keen, and drove the rain full in Nathalie's face; but she enjoyed the struggle, laughed, and gaily shook away the glittering drops from her cheek, to which the breeze gave heightened bloom. She looked the very realization of that delightful Louisa, from whose cheek the poet longed to kiss away the mountain rains. They had not walked far, when a sudden pause occurred. She looked disconcerted, and stopped; he pretended not to see that her slipper had come off. They had not gone on five steps further, when the other slipper stuck fast in the damp earth. This time he smiled. Nathalie looked extremely provoked, and pettishly asked "if it was the slipper's fault if the earth would be damp?" to which he gravely replied, "certainly not." But when this agreeable incident had occurred a certain number of times, Nathalie lost patience, declared the slippers might remain behind if they liked, and that she could very well walk home without them. •

"No, my dear child," said he, with an authoritative kindness, "you will not do this; you will go back to the little hermitage, warm yourself once more, and wait until I send you all you need."

"Very well, Sir," replied Nathalie, with child-like docility, for she was touched at the good-humoured and indulgent patience with which he had borne all her little caprices.

On hearing her ready assent, he praised her for being so good and docile; promised to send soon, and



proceeded on his way, whilst she returned alone to the little hermitage.

### CHAPTER XIII.

NATHALIE pushed the door open a little, hesitatingly. There is a nameless sort of fear no argument can allay. But the place was as they had left it, — quiet and silent. The fire, however, had burned rather low: she closed the door, came forward, and stooped to arrange it. A slight sound made her raise her look with a start; the door opened slowly; a shadow darkened the floor. In the indistinct light, Nathalie perceived a man's form standing on the threshold; she concluded it was Monsieur de Sainville, who had returned for some unknown reason.

"What has happened, Sir?" she asked, rising quickly; but she immediately drew back, with a faint scream, for, by the flickering firelight, she had perceived that it was not Monsieur de Sainville, but his nephew.

There was something in the sudden way in which Charles Marceau chose to appear before the lady of his thoughts, that always jarred disagreeably on her nerves, like an unexpected shock. She now stood, mute and pale, before him, with her hand laid on the table: she needed that support. He drew near the fire-place, and stooped to look at her.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu!" he exclaimed, in a tone of great surprise, "I could scarcely have hoped for this."

Nathalie looked, and felt incredulous. It was strange, indeed, he should know of her presence there; yet she

did not think he had come in by chance. She eyed him with mistrust: he stood on the spot lately occupied by his uncle; his arm rested on the mantel-shelf, and supported his head, which was partly bowed. She could not see his features; but she saw that his wet hair clung to his pale cheeks; his clothes looked heavy with rain. There was a brief silence; but ere long, his low and melancholy voice addressed her:

"Believe me, I needed not this freezing silence to understand that your resentment was unabated. Oh! it is strange, it is bitter, that a deep and devoted love should win nought save such unmitigated aversion!"

He looked up, as he spoke thus, in a moved tone. Nathalie remained cold and silent. She was romantic enough in her way; yet such language found with her no sympathy. This is no uncommon case; the key with which we win, or seek to win, a way to the hearts of others, is not always that which can unlock our own heart. On seeing her standing before him, cold and mute, like a marble statue, the young man could not help exclaiming, almost angrily:

"What have I done? To love you is no crime! What have I done, to be thus treated?"

"May I inquire what you mean by 'thus treated?'" she drily asked.

"You will not even read a letter, breathing only the most respectful tenderness. • What could you fear from it?"

"Nothing," was the calm reply.

"Then why so cruel as to return it unread?"

"For two reasons: the first was, that the manner in which you sent that letter displeased me; the second reason was, that I held myself tacitly bound to Madame

Marceau to hold no communication whatsoever with you."

She spoke with unruffled calmness. He remained moodily silent. She quietly resumed:

"For the same reason, I shall feel deeply indebted to you, if you will be so good as to abridge this interview. I need surely not say how painful it will be to me if you remain here until the arrival of the servant, whom I expect every moment."


"Say rather that every moment of my presence here is hateful to you," he bitterly replied, for her fearless composure verging on indifference offended him deeply.

"It is at least unbecoming here, Sir," she impatiently answered, annoyed at his repeated assertions of her supposed hatred.

"And why unbecoming?" he urged in the same bitter tone; "you were here alone with my uncle half an hour or more; why should it be so very unbecoming if I remain a few minutes with you?"

"You knew he was here?" exclaimed Nathalie drawing back with renewed mistrust.

"Yes I knew it," he replied raising his look until it met hers and remained fastened on her face, fixed and ardent; "yes I knew it. I stood outside that window in the rain, looking at you: there is not a glance, a smile, a motion of yours during the last half-hour which I have not seen and do not remember. I strained my ear to catch the sound of your voice, when I saw your lips moving, but the wind was loud and only once could I hear; it was when you laughed. But of course it was quite natural that I should stand outside, thanking the keen night air for cooling the



fever of my blood; quite natural that he who has no such fever to cool, I suppose, should be in here with you. He stood where I am standing now; you knelt there drying your hair before the fire; he could have touched it by just stretching out his hand so, yet you did not think it needful to be so very far away from him, or to stand, as you do now, behind that table, with your look on the door. He spoke coldly enough, as it seemed to me, yet you smiled, laughed, and looked joyous. You drank out of that glass; when you had done he drank out of it too, and perhaps his lips met the very place yours had touched. He went out alone, but you followed him of your own accord; he offered you his arm, you took it unhesitatingly; the ground was wet in many places; he helped you over, and you did not shrink from him. I have never so much as asked to touch the hem of your robe; and you turn from me with aversion. Why is this? why must he who cares not for them, enjoy freedoms, innocent I grant, but denied me, to whom they would be delightful."

He spoke with rapid and jealous passion. A burning blush of anger and shame settled on Nathalie's cheek; it deepened with every word he uttered, with every image he called up.

"Sir!" said she in angry justification, "I am free with Monsieur de Sainville, because he is my host, and, I believe, my friend, and also because, as you say, he cares not for those freedoms."

"And how do you know he cares not for them?" exclaimed Charles Marceau, with all the unreasonableness and *maladresse* of genuine jealousy; "do you think he will let you see it if he does? Are you not

beautiful for him as well as for any other man? or is there a spell on his eyes that he should not see it?"

"And if it were so, Sir, and if he did see it," exclaimed Nathalie, speaking with unrepressed indignation, "I should still be to him all that you accurately watched and saw this evening."

"And why so?" gloomily asked Charles, "why so?"

"Because I have faith, unbounded faith in Monsieur de Sainville's honour." Her eye sparkled as she spoke, her cheeks were flushed, her lips trembled, and she pressed her clasped hands to her bosom. The young man turned very pale.

"Am I to understand," he asked in a low tone, "that you mean to cast a doubt on my honour?"

She turned quickly towards him and replied with some emotion, "no, Sir; heaven forbid!"

There was something so truthful and confiding in her face at that moment, that he did not see it was only the lingering trace of her previous emotion, and he conceived a sudden hope.

"Then, since you do not mistrust me," he eagerly said; "since you are good enough to have some confidence in me, hear me, I beseech you."

Nathalie shook her head with decisive denial.

"I have heard enough," she said; "you have spoken to me as none ever spoke to me before; may I never hear such language again. Sir, it is not enough to love; there is such a thing as loving delicately; there is such a thing as not uttering language, accusations, and allusions that will make a woman blush with unmerited shame. I know," she added, noticing his darkening brow, "that this frankness offends you; yet I can retract nothing of what you have provoked me

o say. You are proud — resent it; and let resentment, if you will, take the place of any other feeling — I shall not complain.”

He looked at her with anger, in which blended irrepressible tenderness.

“You need not urge me to hate you,” he passionately exclaimed; “I know very well I ought, and I know I shall do so, some day; but I know also, that now, do what I will, I cannot. Haughty girl! Do you know this? do you know you never look half so bewitching as when you wear that proud look and scornful smile? Do you know that your very pride wins, when seeming most to repel; that it has a charm which only draws me more irresistibly to your feet?”

But Nathalie was not touched. In vain he pleaded that his indiscreet language was only the result of passion and of a momentary and absurd jealousy; she could not forgive him the watching at the window; least of all could she forgive his construction on what he had seen. He tried to explain, and made matters worse; then he fell back on the old theme of his love, and poured forth protestation on protestation with rapid and rising eloquence; she heard him with impatience at first, and then with weariness and *ennui* on her face.

“You are not from the south, for you have a heart of ice,” he at length exclaimed, with irrepressible anger; “I am made to talk of love to you. Love! you cannot love.”

A rapid blush suffused Nathalie’s face.

“You know nothing about it,” she replied hastily.

She stood before him, her arms folded on her bosom, her face turned towards him with a haughty smile;

and as she thus unhesitatingly vindicated herself from the reproach of unwomanly heartlessness cast upon her, there was in her look, in her smile, and in her bearing, a provoking sort of grace, not free perhaps from unconscious coquetry, but which was certainly feminine, and, though she knew it not, irresistibly alluring.

He had been pacing the room up and down; he stopped short to look at her; emotion succeeded anger on his features: he felt the spell; approached her, and said in a low submissive tone:

"Be merciful, then! Teach me how I can make you love me."

She had not expected he would take her words as a sort of advance; his doing so offended her. She said in a distant tone:

"As I perceive, Sir, you have not the generosity to desist and leave me, do not wonder if I leave you."

But even as she spoke, a sudden change came over the saturnine features of her exacting lover: she saw him start, change colour, and step back hastily, with his look fastened on the door behind her. She turned quickly round, and saw, not the expected servant, but the pale and angry face of Monsieur de Sainville, as he stood on the threshold, holding the half-open door in his hand.

He closed it; came forward and sat down by the fireside, without once looking at Nathalie, or removing his menacing glance from Charles Marceau. But the calmness of his voice, when he spoke, contrasted strikingly with the stern meaning of his face.

"Charles," said he, quietly, "what has brought you here? I thought you were in Paris."

"I have been ill, Sir," replied the young man, with a confusion that soon wore off.

His uncle eyed him from head to foot with a very expressive gaze.

"I am much better now," continued his nephew; "but the doctor advised change of air — my native air, and so I came —"

"You were born and bred at Havre," coldly interrupted his uncle, "and Havre is some ten leagues off; I suppose you were on your way there, and could not resist the temptation of seeing your mother *en passant*. I need not tell you how much she will value this attention, and be pained at your ill-health."

"Sir," said the young man, colouring, "allow me to say you have no right to express these doubts. This letter, which I had written beforehand, for your perusal, and which contains another letter, addressed to me by my medical attendant, ought not to be needed to convince you of the truth of my assertions."

He produced a sealed letter, and handed it to his uncle as he spoke. Nathalie could not help trying to divine the expression of Monsieur de Sainville's features, as he perused his nephew's epistle by the fire-light; that expression was easy to read — it was one of unmitigated scepticism.

"Why," said he, looking up from the paper, and glancing at Charles, "it seems that you are threatened with consumption, whereupon this wise doctor sends you to Normandy. I should have suggested the south of France, decidedly. But even this," he added, after a slight pause, "does not explain why, instead of entering the château by the front gate, and asking to



see me, you wander about the grounds, on a rainy night, with a letter for me in your pocket."

"Sir," calmly answered his nephew, "do you forget that when we parted, I pledged my word not to return without your permission?"

"I do not forget it, I assure you," was the dry reply.

"Then cease to wonder at the hesitation I felt in appearing before you. I left this afternoon the village where I am staying; the storm overtook me near Sainville; I found one of the smaller gates of these grounds open — I entered unseen; I intended spending the night in this place, and, as I felt anxious not to alarm my mother, either to wait here until you came, or until I met some servant who might become my messenger to you."

"All this is plausible, Charles, — too plausible by far," quietly replied Monsieur de Sainville. "We have in France such an institution as the post-office, to which you might have confided your letter. To come here as you came was the very way to alarm your mother; to speak to a servant, the very way to let her know of your presence. You have broken your word to me, but I do not resent this half so much as your want of candour in not confessing a feeling which — you may as well know it — is your only excuse in my eyes. Why, when I asked the reason of your return, had you not the frankness to say: 'I came back here, led by a passion which wise men call folly, but which subdues the reason of the very wisest; I entered this place, not by a scarcely possible chance, but because I knew that she whom I sought was here.' I blame you, Charles, for shrinking from the avowal

of what most men take pride in, — passion, and its follies.”

The young man coloured deeply at this unexpected reproof; and Nathalie asked herself if it were indeed the grave, the cold Monsieur de Sainville who had thus spoken.

“You are severe, Sir,” exclaimed the young man, with ill-repressed irritation; “but ask yourself how I could confide in one whose native coldness, indifference, and rooted scepticism, in matters of the heart, I knew so well?”

A slight hectic flush crossed the pale cheek of Monsieur de Sainville. Nathalie perhaps ought not to have looked, but look she did, as if attracted by an irresistible spell; his glance met hers, and though he was a grave man, and she but a young girl, he coloured, looked disconcerted, and turned his glance away; but he recovered almost immediately, and addressing his nephew, said, in his most composed tone:

“This at least is a sensible excuse; but to spare you unnecessary trouble, to render this explanation more clear and brief, I may as well inform you that you have little or nothing to disguise from me; that, attracted by the sound of voices, I returned to this place in time to overhear a warm and generous vindication of my honour drawn forth by accusations which I did not hear, for which I do not care, but the nature of which I can, by what followed, guess easily.”

Charles Marceau slightly turned pale; a burning blush overspread Nathalie's face.

“Then you listened,” exclaimed the young man.

"Precisely; — I listened; for a few moments, at least," very calmly returned his uncle.

"You! Sir; you, a gentleman!" and the word was uttered with indignant emphasis.

"A gentleman, as you say," replied Monsieur de Sainville, looking him full and firmly in the face.

"Monsieur de Sainville," angrily cried the young man, "you told me yourself that in certain matters you would never interfere; that the authority to which I freely submitted should never extend to feelings which would render it unbearable; you have upbraided me with breach of my word; allow me to ask if you keep yours?"

Nathalie looked at Monsieur de Sainville with some alarm; but he remained quite composed, folded his arms across his breast, and eyed his nephew with a stern smile.

"Charles," said he, in his most unruffled tones, "do not talk so loud when you are in a lady's presence; and if you can, speak more sensibly when you speak to a man of the world. I say this as advice; the delusion under which you labour, — namely, that I listened to pry into your feelings, and interfere with your actions, is too absurd for me to resent it. Love where you like, — act as you like; should your conduct reach a certain point, I shall know how to throw off the responsibility of your actions. You have broken your word; mine is still, and ever will be, inviolate. No matter what I may think of what I happened to overhear this evening, — rest assured that your mother's brother will never remember it."

He uttered this with a calmness that deeply disconcerted the young man, then turned towards Natha-

ie, and resumed, now speaking with the ease of a man of the world, and the courtesy of a gentleman:

"It was the host and friend of Mademoiselle Montolieu, who, finding her subjected once more to an intrusion which he had hoped would never occur again whilst she resided here, heard enough to convince himself that the conversation was on her part a most involuntary one, and came forward when it was his evident duty to interfere."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu is fortunate in such guardianship," bitterly said Charles.

"Yes, Sir, Mademoiselle Montolieu is very fortunate, indeed," quickly replied Nathalie, going up, involuntarily perhaps, to Monsieur de Sainville's chair as she spoke, and thence looking at Charles with a little indignant air.

The child-like warmth and action made Monsieur de Sainville smile; he raised his look, eyed her with a slow and silent gaze, then turned once more towards his nephew, and said, in a much milder tone:

"I think, Charles, we have had enough of explanations. For the sake of a passion there is so much to justify, I overlook the fact that you have broken, or almost broken your word to me. For the same reason, I will endeavour to forget that you have presumed to intrude upon a young lady residing under my roof, consequently under my express protection. But let such an occurrence never take place again."

This sudden and unexpected leniency surprised the young girl; but Charles Marceau looked dark and moody. His uncle resumed:

"With regard to the authority you have allowed me over you — I need not remind you that it was not

of my own seeking — you shall be released from it the moment you wish."

He spoke rather more coldly now; but Charles had once more become quite cool and collected: he gravely replied,

"I may have spoken hastily, Sir, but I do not think I have expressed that desire."

"I suppose you do not object to return to Paris immediately?"

"I shall do so."

"Then I believe," observed Monsieur de Sainville, rising, "that there is no more to say."

"Uncle," said the young man, stepping forward, and, for the first time, addressing his relative thus: "Allow me to say a few words to Mademoiselle Montolieu, before she goes."

"No, no," hastily said Nathalie, drawing closer to Monsieur de Sainville, as if fearing he would leave her alone with his nephew; "you have nothing to say, Sir, — I have nothing to hear."

"I meant in the presence of my uncle," said the young man, looking much mortified.

"Will you not hear what he has to say?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

She hesitated; but sat down, in token of compliance.

Monsieur de Sainville drew away a few steps: Charles confronted them both.

"Uncle," said he, quietly, "allow me first to ask you a question. You know that I love this young lady, who seemed so indignant at the idea of remaining a few seconds alone with me: do you believe my affection sincere and true?"

"And pray," replied Monsieur de Sainville, with naughty surprise, "how should I know the nature of our affection?"

"Because you can distinguish between the truth and the mockery of passion," replied his nephew, with a fixed look; "because, if report speaks true, you once loved, yourself — ay, and loved so deeply, as not to care to love again."

Nathalie's head was resting on her hand; but she looked up very suddenly. Monsieur de Sainville saw her not — his face was pale and rigid with astonished passion; his blue eyes, generally as calm as the surface of deep, but unstirred waters, now shone with angry light. He made an effort to be composed, and merely said, in a low tone, "Charles!"

"Yes, Sir, I know," returned the young man, "I know I am recalling the memory of a bitter past; but you have humbled me — you have made me look like a child found at fault, unworthy of serious reproof — chid for awhile, and forgiven. Think of the time when you loved as I love, and wonder not if I feel reckless."

Monsieur de Sainville looked keenly at Charles. The wrathful expression of his face gradually subsided, until it wholly vanished, and yielded to a sort of calm surprise, perhaps at his nephew's daring, perhaps at his own easily-moved anger; but of a surprise in which there blended at least a certain degree of admiration.

"I rather like daring," he said, at length; "but it is a sharp weapon to handle. Do not repeat this evening's experiment. Who knows whether it would succeed a second time? Yet say what you have to

say freely. You seem to think I have slighted you in a manner and in a presence which made the slight doubly keen; for what man but wishes to be honoured and esteemed by the woman he admires and loves? If I have done so, I have indeed wronged you; — speak out, and prove it.”

He spoke thus himself, with the firm and manly dignity of one who loved to assert his own strong will; but made not himself its slave, nor that of any passion; however subtle the disguise of right and justice it might wear.

Nathalie looked at him with sympathetic admiration. She had not that inflexible and conscientious judgment, — that calm will, ever ready to act, guide, or restrain, with scarce the seeming of an effort; but she admired these qualities with the superstitious reverence which the inexperienced mariner feels for the pilot who guides his barque through foaming breaker and stormy wave, and leads it thence, with calm eye and ever steady hand, into the broad, still waters. She liked courage and energy, too; and could not help casting on Charles Marceau a glance more kindly than any he had yet won from her. But the young man seemed already to repent the bold language which had led to all this. He stood before his uncle, in an attitude between hesitation, doubt, and surprise, half shunning Monsieur de Sainville's steady glance, and looking not unlike a wary archer, who for once has overshot his mark, and coolly meditates a surer aim.

“Uncle,” he slowly said, “I never accused you of wronging me. I spoke, indeed, under the influence

of strong emotion, else I should not have recalled to your memory a painful past."

"Then he is not so daring after all," thought Nathalie, rather scornfully, and true to the feminine instinct of admiring courage, whether moral or physical. Yet she wronged the young man. Whatever his faults might be, he was no coward. But love was not his only aim in life; he had another mistress besides Nathalie to please; one whose favour he prized no less than hers, and sought not with less patient eagerness — Ambition. His uncle could do much to make that proud lady gracious; and Charles knew it.

"Then what do you want of me?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

He spoke sharply, and looked almost disappointed at this sudden calming down from audacity to prudence.

"Nothing," respectfully replied his nephew, "save that you would help to efface an impression you have helped to produce."

"I have agreed to forward your views in life; but not, I think, your affairs of the heart," replied Monsieur de Sainville, with ill-concealed irony. "Still, if you think me bound to do so in justice —"

"In generosity," interrupted Charles.

"Or if you think I can serve in such matters, why then be it so."

"Then, since you do not object," composedly said Charles.

"Object?" asked his uncle, with a peculiar smile, "why should I?"

"I will request your opinion and advice."



"Opinion and advice!" echoed Monsieur de Sainville; "I never ask or take, and rarely give either; but if you value mine, you are welcome to them."

He sat down as he spoke thus, with evident carelessness, as if the passing interest he had for a moment felt were now suddenly gone. Nathalie, surprised and hurt that he should so readily agree to interfere in this matter, gave him a half-offended look, but he did not heed it. He sat back in his chair, half-reclining, with arms folded, look sedate, and in an attitude of cold and negligent dignity. He seemed like one who may lend himself to the common uses of daily life, but who never forgets that his realm and province lie far beyond, — where? — within himself, perchance.

There was in all this something so indifferent and so haughty, that, for a moment, Nathalie thought, almost angrily, "Why, who, and what is that man, that he should set himself above such things, or make himself so much of a ruler and a king?"

"Well," said he, very quietly, "you do not speak, Charles?"

The young man was looking at Nathalie with a half-entreating, half-watchful look, as if bidding her note the words he was going to utter — the reply they would win.

Monsieur de Sainville raised his head, followed the direction of his nephew's look, smiled, resumed his old attitude, and said, "I am waiting."

"Why not *we* are waiting: it would be more royal a great deal," indignantly thought the young girl.

Monsieur de Sainville noticed her flushed face, and quietly asked if she found the room too close. Nathalie,

a little disconcerted, did not answer. Charles, whose pause was not one of hesitation, but of thought, now spoke:

"Sir, do you believe in my attachment for Mademoiselle Montolieu?"

"Certainly," was the calm reply.

"Do you object to that attachment?"

"Object to it! no; why should I?"

"Do you approve it?" He spoke low, but with a fixed look. Monsieur de Sainville returned the glance, and said, very calmly:

"To approve would be to admit that I have a right to object. My guardianship over either you or Mademoiselle Montolieu extends not so far."

"May I know, uncle, in what light you view that attachment?" placidly urged Charles.

"As a thing that concerns me not," frigidly replied his uncle; "my only concern in this matter is to see that Mademoiselle Montolieu is not annoyed: you may feel what you like."

"But you do not object to it?" said Charles, again.

"No," again replied his uncle, smiling, as if he had no difficulty in understanding why Charles persisted in his question.

The young man looked at Nathalie; there was something of triumph in his look, which brought a more scornful light to her eyes. She understood, and resented his meaning.

"Uncle," resumed Charles, once more addressing his relative, "allow me now to ask your advice. When a man loves a woman, and is so unfortunate as not to be able to convince her of his affection, what can he do?"

"Persist or desist, — just as he chooses," dryly replied Monsieur de Sainville.

"But what do you advise me to do?" persisted Charles.

"Convince Mademoiselle Montolieu, if you can, Charles; and if you cannot, do not torment her."

"But you advise me to convince her, if I can," urged Charles.

"By all means," was the unhesitating reply.

"And you do not object to my passion?"

"No," impatiently answered his uncle.

Nathalie coloured and looked offended. Charles turned towards her; his look was downcast; his voice measured and low.

"Mademoiselle," said he calmly, "you were good enough on my uncle's solicitation to agree to listen to me. It may be long before we meet again: you have refused to hear me alone: you know what I feel for you; allow me to ask if I may hope?"

Nathalie did not answer. He repeated his question, still she gave him no reply. A third time he asked.

"May I hope?"

She looked up, and said quietly,

"You may hope, Sir, since you call it so, or not hope — just as you please. I have nothing to do with either feeling."

"Is this scorn?" he asked, turning pale.

"No, Sir, by no means," she answered with something like gentleness; "it is simply that you have asked me a question you have no right to ask."

"Uncle," exclaimed Charles, "I appeal to you; was my question fair?"

"I am no arbiter in this case," replied Monsieur de Sainville, speaking very coldly.

"In the name of justice, Sir, I conjure you to answer me: was that question a fair question?"

"I think it was a fair question," gravely replied Monsieur de Sainville, thus adjured.

"I deny it, I deny it," exclaimed Nathalie rising as she spoke, looking indignantly at Monsieur de Sainville, and haughtily at his nephew; "I deny it, and since you will have the truth, Sir, — why, you may hear it. I refuse to answer, because I do not think that words and protestations give a claim to the attention, which is implied by the fact of answering. When a man has proved the truth and courage of his affection, when though he should not win love, he may at least compel esteem and respect, then perhaps, but not till then, he may ask a plain question, and expect a plain reply. Mind, Sir, I do not accuse you; I merely say that I know you not."

Charles said nothing, but he evidently chafed inwardly. Monsieur de Sainville, who had been observing Nathalie's changing face with some attention, now observed with a smile that seemed to imply he was not indifferent to the perverse pleasure of provoking her a little further:

"Pray do not imagine I meant you were bound to reply, but allow me to ask if you do not take too rigid and exclusive a view of so important a question. Proofs! What man can give proofs of mere feelings? What woman is sufficiently impartial to test the proofs when given? Would it not be safer to go at once on the principle of believing in the affection professed?"

"Sir," said Nathalie turning towards him with a kindling look, "allow me to say you evidently do not understand either this subject or me."

"Indeed!" he interjected, looking rather amused.

"Yes, indeed," she echoed; "you seem to think I am guided by prudence; I am not, Sir; I am guided by pride."

"Pride is a dangerous guide, Mademoiselle Montolieu," he observed with a smile.

"But at least frank and true," she replied, with some energy. "Sir, men have many ways of vindicating their honour and asserting their dignity, — woman but one. I am — whatever my station may be — a woman, and I will exact as much observance and respect as any great lady; neither poverty nor obscure birth shall make me hate one atom of my pride. Monsieur Marceau is free to carry his affections elsewhere; if he wishes to know my mind, he shall bide my pleasure and my time. I will not admit that, for having spoken to me three times — every time against my will — one, of whom I otherwise know nothing, has a claim to a serious reply, or a right to be heard. Women are surely not so cheap that such mere attentions should make a man win or lose them!"

She spoke with all the eloquent rapidity of southern vehemence, without a second's pause or a moment's hesitation.

"I believe, Charles," quietly said Monsieur de Saintville, "that this is decisive."

"Decisive!" echoed the young man, in a tone of subdued irritation; "How so? If Mademoiselle Montolieu has refused to say 'hope,' she has not said 'do

not hope.' Why, then, should I not, as you yourself advised me, Sir, seek to convince and change her."

"Provided she permits your attentions," coldly said his uncle.

"No, no," quickly exclaimed Nathalie; "I do not, — I will not."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said Charles, in a low tone, "this is strange and contradictory. . You exact proofs, and then refuse them. Shall I ask if you are capricious?"

"And shall I ask, Sir, if you are free to give those proofs?" coldly replied Nathalie. "I speak not in a spirit of recrimination," she added, more gently, as she saw him change colour. "I might have alluded to this before, but I thought it more just and generous to consider the offer of your affection in itself, and without reference to circumstances over which you had no control. But though I reproach you not for that which is no fault of yours, wonder not if I decline attentions your mother would oppose or resent, and to accept which would imply, on my part, either the meanest perfidy or the most heroic patience, as I chose to deceive or brave her. Perfidious I never will be; and patient, Sir, you know well enough that I am not."

The young man did not answer. What could he say? His uncle rose, walked up to Nathalie, and laying his hand gently on her arm, said to his nephew, eyeing him steadily as he spoke:

"Charles, you love this young girl. I do not blame you; and if, spite of all the obstacles which rise against your passion, you choose to persist, why, then, love on, and run your chance. Fortune may end by

befriending you. But, in the meantime, do not forget this: through your own imprudence, this same young girl has become my guest; she is under the shield of my roof, name, and honour. You have yourself heard her accepting this guardianship, which shall only be to protect, and never to control her. I shall, therefore, no more permit an intrusion on her privacy than if she were my sister or my child. Feel as you like, and as much as you like; but confine yourself to feeling. Should anything like what has happened this evening occur again, I warn you that I shall not be so easily appeased; but that I shall resent it as much, and precisely in the same way, as if we were the merest strangers, without one drop of the same blood." He spoke imperatively, and looked almost stern; but, as if repenting this, he resumed, in his usual tone: "I speak thus to warn, not to threaten. I have faith in your good sense and honour."

Thus saying, he quietly passed the unresisting arm of Nathalie within his own, and left the hermitage.

The young man did not reply. His face was pale; his lips were compressed. He walked up to the door, and stood there motionless. His moody and abstracted glance long followed the two forms, now slowly vanishing in the evening obscurity.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE walk home was silent. The rain had ceased; Monsieur de Sainville led his companion by the terraces; it was the longer but also the dryer way. Once when they came to a pool of water, visible by the faint and trembling moonlight, he lifted her over it

with as little hesitation and as much ease as if she were a child. She gave him a half-offended look, but on seeing how abstracted he looked, and how little he evidently thought of the cause of her displeasure, she had discretion enough to feel that it would be better not to seem offended. She did not speak until they entered the lime-tree avenue.

"Where are we going, Sir?" she then asked.

"To the library, unless you object. There is a private staircase by which you can go up to your own room at once. It is therefore shorter than to go by the front entrance."

Nathalie by no means objected. She had now been out several hours; her long absence would be thought strange; the sooner she could change her attire and make her appearance, the better.

It was Monsieur de Sainville's habit to have every room devoted to his separate use lit at a certain hour, whether he was present or not.

He disliked to repeat the same orders evening after evening; indeed, whenever he took a new servant he gave him a concise and exact account of his duties; informing him that this account was given once for all, that he consequently hoped not to be under the necessity of having to repeat it; and, thanks to the quiet authority of his manner, the necessity rarely occurred. It was owing to this peculiarity that Nathalie now found the library quite solitary, but in a brilliant state of illumination. A large lamp shed its light on the table; and waxlights, which had been burning for some time in silver sconces hanging against the walls, filled the place with their clear pale ray.

No spot of a room where Monsieur de Sainville



chose to be, was to remain in inconvenient obscurity. Few men cared so little for the more delicate luxuries of life, but few, also, made everything within their sphere and power so subservient to their will as he did to his.

"That man turns the very lights into his obedient slaves," thought Nathalie, a little indignantly. A rapid look, given whilst Monsieur de Sainville closed the door, had sufficed her to observe all this, and to comment upon it inwardly. As he came forward she remembered, and looked for, the private staircase he had mentioned, but looked in vain; she could only see two doors, that by which they had just entered, and that which led to the hall. Sign of other egress there was none. She looked puzzled and he amused.

"I see," said he, "that you are impatient to go; but we cannot part thus. You are a little vexed with me, are you not?"

He spoke with a smile which displeased Nathalie, and made her look as she felt; but he was one to bear a lady's displeasure with equal composure and courtesy, and still waited her answer. She hesitated — then replied with sudden promptness:

"Yes, Sir, I am vexed with you."

He looked more amused than alarmed, and said quietly:

"Pray, what have I done?"

She remained silent.

"You will not tell me my offence?"

No reply.

"What! not even a hint?"

She looked up and eyed him very composedly.

"I will tell you, Sir," she said, "if you will only assure me you do not know or guess."

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he replied, in a tone of feeling reproach, "this answer does not sound like yours, for it is not quite frank; there is a decided air of Norman and legal ambiguousness about it; however, it implies so flattering a belief in my veracity that I know not how to complain. You are vexed with me because I spoke as I did, and yet I scarcely regret it; for had I not spoken so, I should not know with how much spirit, courage, and frankness a young girl could assert the privileges and dignity of her sex."

He spoke quite seriously now; he spoke too in words of praise, rare at any time from his lips, and for the first time addressed to Nathalie by him. She felt moved, but did not reply; he resumed in his old manner:

"Pray let us be friends; it is unnatural for guardian and ward to quarrel."

"Unnatural!" said Nathalie, half-turning round with a demure smile; "why all the old plays and tales I ever read ran on the quarrels of guardians and wards."

"But we will do better."

"Yes, much better. Besides, guardians in those times seem to have been peevish and so old."

"Then we are friends?" he said again, without seeming to heed this remark.

She smiled, and spontaneously held out her hand in token of reconciliation. He took it, and looked at her, with smiling kindness, as a father might look at his child.

"Poor little thing!" he said, at length, when she

began to wonder at his silence; "I dare say you have not many friends here?"

"Two," she answered.

"Two!" said he, surprised; "I thought you had only your sister."

She too looked surprised.

"And my guardian," she said, half in jest — half in earnest.

He looked at her; she coloured involuntarily, and without knowing why; something like a sudden cloud passed across his brow; he did not drop her hand, but his hold relaxed; she wished to withdraw it, for she had an uncomfortable sensation of having gone too far; but he detained it firmly within his, and said, very seriously:

"Yes, you have two friends."

He let her hand go, went to the library, and touched a spring; one of the compartments, which Nathalie had thought to be filled with books, opened, and disclosed steep and narrow steps, winding away into deepening gloom. He stood below, holding the lamp, whilst she went up; she was light and agile, and reached the top of the staircase without one false step; there a door, which yielded to her touch, admitted her into the long passage, at the end of which stood her own room. She remembered having heard Aunt Radegonde say that the door facing this led to one of the turrets — no doubt that of Monsieur de Sainville. This accounted for his being so seldom met or seen in the other parts of the château.

She had soon changed her dress; but as she smoothed her hair, she suddenly missed a narrow velvet, which she wore bound several times around her

head, according to the fashion of the period. This velvet, a present from Aunt Radegonde, worn that day for the first time, was, unfortunately, distinguished by a little silver edge. She concluded she had left it in the hermitage.

"*Allons!*" she impatiently thought; "I hoped to keep all this quiet; but I suppose that the first servant who goes in there to-morrow morning will know of my presence, thanks to that velvet and its silver edge."

She felt provoked, and then pride asked, "Why should she care?" and bade her go down quite composedly to the drawing-room.

Madame Marceau sat in majestic state, with her pile of cushions behind and around her, and something of haughtiness in the very way in which her feet rested on a broad stool. With her shawl, her silks, her sparkling jewels, and her dark face, on which the light of the lamp now shone full and clear, she looked like a handsome eastern despot. Nathalie paused near the door, to look at the haughty lady.

"When will that woman wish me to be her daughter?" she thought, remembering what had passed that same evening.

She slowly came forward, and silently took her usual seat. How much had occurred since she had left that drawing-room a few hours before! Madame Marceau was not alone; her friend partly reclined on a low couch, where, with her indolent attitude and half-closed eyes, she looked like a languid sultana, as calm and apathetic as the other was active and restless. They were engaged in earnest conversation, that is to say, Madame Marceau spoke, and Madame de Jussac put in a word now and then. The accident

and its consequences, which had apparently extended much farther up the river, occupied them exclusively.

"Deplorable!" exclaimed Madame Marceau; "ten families ruined; we must, of course, do something for these people."

"Are they Monsieur de Sainville's tenants?" asked Madame de Jussac.

"No, they are not on our land; but we are not the less bound to come to their aid. Mademoiselle Montolieu, Madame de Jussac says you remained out; I hope you did not get wet. *Ma chère*," she added, without waiting for Nathalie's reply, "what do you say to a lottery?"

"Excellent!" was the calm answer.

"Excellent, as you say." From that moment the idea of the lottery seemed to occupy her exclusively.

Madame de Jussac turned towards Nathalie, and quietly asked if she had remained out in the rain, and got very wet?

"Not very wet," replied Nathalie, much disturbed.

It did not add to her composure, to perceive that Madame de Jussac's slow, but attentive look was scanning her change of dress.

"You must have found a convenient shelter," she observed, in her languid way; "I never saw such heavy rain: you were surely not out all the time?"

Nathalie bent over her work, without answering: indeed, Madame Marceau gave her no time to do so. Her own impression was, that Nathalie had kept away from the drawing-room through a very proper sense of discretion; where, and how she had spent that evening, was a minor point, in which she took not the least interest. She now engaged her inqui-

sitive friend in so close a conversation on the proposed lottery; its probable results; the prizes to be drawn; the tickets to be placed, and other such questions, that Madame the Jussac had not the opportunity of renewing her inquiries.

About half an hour had elapsed, when the door opened, and Monsieur de Sainville entered. He took no notice of Nathalie, and sat at the end of the table farthest from that where she worked, near the two ladies. The ruined families, the lottery, and Madame de Jussac, were immediately forgotten for "dear Armand, his heroism," and so forth. "Had he got wet? he must be chilly? — could nothing be done?"

Madame Marceau's Armand heard her, and replied, with evident, though repressed impatience. Nathalie took a mischievous pleasure in noticing how he fretted internally beneath his sister's praise, and the word of quiet eulogy which Madame de Jussac put in now and then.

At length both ladies desisted; but first Madame Marceau adroitly dropped the word "lottery."

"A lottery — what for?" he promptly asked.

"For those poor ruined families, Armand." As she spoke, Madame Marceau looked anxiously at her brother. Nathalie, who had formerly heard him mention this not very elevated sort of charity in terms of contemptuous pity, expected some objection, but he only looked thoughtful, and said nothing.

"Yes," gaily continued his sister, interpreting his silence into approval; "a lottery we must have. Mademoiselle Nathalie," — on hearing herself thus familiarly addressed, the young girl perceived that the lady was in high good humour; "Mademoiselle

Nathalie, I claim a purse of your work, at the very least; you, *ma chère*, have already pledged yourself to the contribution of I know not how many charming things; my aunt must give us some *chef-d'œuvre* in the knitting way. Do not think to escape, Armand: you have brought back too many delightful curiosities from your wanderings, not to have a few to spare for the sake of charity."

"True; but I will give you a greater curiosity by far — good advice."

Madame Marceau coughed, and looked annoyed.

"Well, Armand," she said, with a constrained smile, "let us hear this good advice."

"In the first place, how many tickets do you mean to issue?"

"Two or three thousand: less will not do."

"How will you dispose of them?"

"Madame de Jussac has very kindly offered to dispose of half the number issued."

"But how will you dispose of the other thousand or fifteen hundred?"

Madame Marceau's brow darkened: this was a sensitive point. She had been so long buried in *bourgeois* obscurity, and her brother cared so little for society, that her circle of acquaintance was as yet very narrow. This was a matter in which she could not think of imposing on Madame de Jussac, on whose lips she now detected a smile of careless triumph. Thanking her brother very little for this exposure, she coldly replied,

"I really do not know."

He smiled in a very provoking manner, as if rather pleased than otherwise at having thrown cold water on

is sister's schemes. Such, at least, was Nathalie's haritable conclusion as she looked up from her work, and attentively watched his face. She sat rather in the shade, and he at the other end of the table, in the circle of light shed by the lamp.

"We must have less tickets, I suppose," said Madame Marceau, in a vexed tone.

"Impossible," quietly replied her brother; "the damage done, as you say, is great. The produce of the lottery must be worth offering."

"Which means that I had better give it up," observed the lady, rather indignantly; "is that your 'good advice,' Armand?"

"By no means," he replied, smiling again; "I have only pointed out the difficulty; I am going to deliver you from it now. The lottery is evidently insufficient; but on the day when it is to take place, throw open the grounds to the good people of Sainville, — not the garden, for to that I have a decided objection. Give them a little *fête champêtre*, with a dance on the lawn; let the price of entrance not be too high, — *bourgeois* are sparing of their money. Many will come, and the produce of both fête and lottery will, I am sure, cover all the losses these poor people have sustained."

Madame Marceau heard her brother with a triumphant surprise she took great pains to conceal from the languid look of her friend. But, spite of all she could do, her haughty face was flushed, and her dark eyes kindled, as she listened to this solution of the difficulty. The sister of Monsieur de Sainville knew she could not be a political lady, on the legitimate side, at least, like Madame de Jussac, who



guided all the intrigues of the district; for her friend was a Countess, and she was unfortunately the widow of a merchant; besides, her brother, through whom she might have been something, professed a profound indifference for every political party. She could not be a graceful and accomplished lady of the world, for she had no high connexions, and would not stoop to second-rate ones. But she could be a popular lady, — the lady of Sainville. Abroad she had many rivals, but none at home, and like Cæsar, she loved where she did rule to rule alone. The suggestions of her brother fell on her ear like the realization of her long-cherished and ambitious dreams. She beheld the fête in anticipation; she saw herself the queen of the day, sailing through respectful crowds, polite to a select few, gracious to all, and patronizing *bourgeois* and shopkeepers to her haughty heart's content. Nay, she could not help remembering that the elections were at hand; if Armand would only consent to become a candidate, let himself be elected, and agree to take his seat as deputy? He could if he would; then why should he not? She fastened her dark, stealthy eyes on her brother, and eagerly scanned that face, so pale and severe, which ever seemed to baffle the scrutiny it irresistibly attracted. Why had he, who by no means professed himself to be a philanthropist, been so zealous in saving the paltry crops of still more paltry villagers? Why had he, who despised the surreptitious charity of lotteries, so readily agreed to hers? Why had he, who was so jealous of his privacy and solitude, offered to open his luxurious and carefully-guarded grounds to the prying gaze and obtrusive presence of paying guests? Why was all this?

Was it the result of some deep and secret scheme? Did he, who chose to appear so sceptical and so indifferent, long in his heart for political power, — that passion of man's noon-day life? She scarcely hoped so, and yet it would be strange indeed if he, — still in all the fulness and vigour of existence, — had not even a desire to fulfil or an aim to pursue. But, far as her thoughts had wandered, the cautious lady knew now to seem not to have for one instant forgotten the lottery and the proposed fête.

"Your advice is good, Armand," she smilingly said, "but expensive."

This objection was intended to blind Madame de Jussac, who was to conclude that her friend had been engaged in economical calculations. Monsieur de Sainville looked surprised.

"I dare say you will not mind either trouble or expense incurred for the sake of a good deed," he replied.

"I see he is willing to pay, but will not appear in the matter," she thought. "What if we have the fête without the dancing?" she again objected, now speaking aloud.

"By no means," he very quickly said; "without the dancing! Why, Rosalie, half the people would not come."

"Oh! proud brother of mine, you, too, have set your heart on popularity and power!" inwardly exclaimed Madame Marceau, looking at him with secret triumph, and already beholding herself in Paris, the centre of a political coterie in her brother's hôtel, whilst Charles went off as attaché d'ambassade with his Excellency, no matter who.

"I give in," she said aloud, as if she had all this time been engaged in some economical struggle; "and sincerely thank my dear brother for his judicious advice."

"Then I shall test your gratitude," he replied, "by requesting that you will take on yourself the sole management of everything, and for once allow me to drop the character of host and become your guest."

Madame Marceau dilated with triumph.

The struggle had been long; but her brother acknowledged her power; there was sweetness in this tardy victory. She felt happy, elated, and glanced with secret exultation at Madame de Jussac, who, in her placid way, had already chosen to drop a few hints concerning Monsieur de Sainville's singular strength of character. But the lady was not at that moment looking towards her; she was amusing herself with watching Nathalie, opposite whom her sofa lay. On the first mention of the fête, the young girl had laid down her work on her lap and listened attentively: but, as the discussion continued, and the plan matured, she gradually and unconsciously edged her chair round so as to face the speakers. Now she was sitting with both her arms resting and folded on the table, half-bent forward with eager look and parted lips, in an attitude of breathless attention.

"I know who will dance at the fête," said Madame de Jussac, with a smile, thus drawing attention to the young girl.

Nathalie, who had remained wholly unconscious of observation, started, coloured, hung down her head, and pretended to be looking for her work. Vain attempt at composure! When she looked up, her face

was radiant, her eyes danced with delight, and irresistible smiles played around her demurely closed lips.

"Do you care about dancing?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, looking at her for the first time since his entrance.

"Yes, Sir, I like it," she replied, a little mortified to find he had so soon forgotten their conversation in the hermitage.

"Then I promise you that you shall not miss one quadrille," observed Madame Marceau, now in her most amiable mood. "Come, *ma chère*, when shall it be?"

Madame de Jussac, thus addressed, replied calmly; but her friend was in high spirits, and went on arranging and projecting for an hour and more. Then, however, a sudden silence fell on the whole party. Monsieur de Sainville looked grave, almost moody; Madame Marceau thought him absorbed by the coming meeting, and she already revelled in the imagined triumphs of the *grande dame populaire*, and of the political woman. Nathalie worked on in silence, and looked very serious, but all the time a bright vision floated before her: she saw a gay dance on the green; she heard the merry music — merry even to those who care little for dancing — of galop, waltz, and quadrille. Madame de Jussac looked on through her half-closed eyes, and drew her own conclusions from all she saw, until the party separated at a later hour than usual.

The week which this lady spent at the château was not productive in incident. Madame Marceau, though affecting familiarity, and calling her *ma chère*,

*ma bonne*, and *ma belle*, to show that they were old friends — they had known one another in childhood — was in evident awe of her quiet guest, and submitted to all her opinions and decisions in matters of worldly knowledge. Aunt Radegonde, without speaking too openly, gave broad hints to Nathalie about people who made one feel chill and uncomfortable. Monsieur de Sainville looked more cold and haughty than he had ever looked.

Nathalie soon noticed a tacit sort of quarrel was continually going on between him and his sister's friend. At first, the lady enveloped him in a soft silken net of the most subtle courtesy and grace. It was flattery so delicate, that no man could possibly resent it, and then succeeded a constant instinctive sort of appealing to his opinion and judgment, that was far more flattering than mere speech; but in an unlucky hour Madame de Jussac said something about politics, and confessed the warm interest she felt in the elder Bourbons. Nathalie saw Monsieur de Sainville smile, as if he now understood why he had been so perseveringly courted, and from that moment the quarrel began. Of course, it was a polite, well-bred, smiling quarrel: politics formed the ostensible theme, but perhaps politics had in reality little to do with it. There might be such a thing as piqued *amour-propre* on one side, and ironical resentment on the other.

It was, perhaps, for the charitable purpose of punishing Monsieur de Sainville, who now scarcely noticed the young girl, that Madame de Jussac suddenly took a great fancy to her, and almost exclusively engaged her company; he certainly did not appear to view their intimacy with pleasure; but Nathalie,

liques at his coldness, did not care. She was young, frank as her years, and she yielded freely to the insinuating grace which no one knew better how to exercise than Madame de Jussac.

At the end of a week the lady left, promising to come back for the *fête*. After her departure, matters resumed their old course at the château. Madame Marceau moved about once more with authoritative air and speech; Aunt Radegonde was garrulous and cheerful; and Nathalie felt that the change gradually vanished from the manner of Monsieur de Sainville.

## CHAPTER XV.

FOR the next fortnight, the château was kept in a constant state of bustle and preparation by Madame Marceau de Sainville, as she now began to be called. The little town echoed with her praises, and the rumour of her charity and munificence spread wherever the tidings of the disaster, which she thus generously sought to repair, had penetrated.

Whilst she disposed of tickets, gave orders, made purchases, and saw to everything, Nathalie and the Canoness worked together in the boudoir or in the garden. Aunt Radegonde, in her zeal, nearly knitted herself ill; Nathalie was fully as industrious. This busy fortnight, with its day of pleasure still in view, delighted her. The time passed lightly. At night, she dreamt of endless dancing on the lawn; and all day long she worked at various articles of fancy work, destined for the lottery, and of which Madame Marceau provided the materials. To the annoyance of

his aunt, "who, not being inquisitive, would not have given a pin to know," Monsieur de Sainville declined exhibiting his contributions to the general fund, and took it on himself to criticize very freely the various articles manufactured by his aunt and Nathalie. He said the flimsy counterpane could give no warmth; censured the cobweb mittens; pronounced the operacaps unbecoming; and so much irritated the little Canoness, that she told him roundly "he could not do so much, were he to try ever so long," — a fact he willingly granted. Nathalie's productions fared still worse. He held up her embroidered bag to ridicule; declared that her cigar-case was such as no man of sense would use; but chiefly derided a little round silk purse, with a silver clasp, which she was knitting, and which was destined to hold a Napoleon, or the change of one. This he declared it could not. Nathalie, piqued in her *amour-propre*, insisted that it could. The contest lasted until the purse was finished; her host then tested its merits, in the presence of Nathalie, to whose indelible disgrace it was found totally deficient. Aunt Radegonde warmly took the part of her young friend, who, as she always said, "was too meek, poor little thing! to defend herself properly;" an assertion which, though too polite to contradict, her nephew always heard with his sceptical smile.

At length the great day came, and a lovely day it was, — clear, bright, and sunny. The grounds were not to be thrown open until three in the afternoon, and at three precisely, Nathalie ran down to the drawing-room to find the Canoness, whom she had vainly sought for in her boudoir. She opened and closed the door with a sort of unnecessary vivacity, which cha-

racterized her least motions, and came running in, exclaiming, in a light, cheerful voice:

"Are you here, Marraine? I am quite ready."

She looked around: the Canoness was sitting in her arm-chair, dressed in grey silk, and with a profusion of rich laces, that gave costliness to her otherwise simple attire. She eyed the young girl from head to foot with a critical glance, and smiled approvingly. Nathalie was, however, very simply dressed in a clear white muslin, whose light folds fell down to her feet; a black lace mantilla, worn at the back of her head, and falling down on her neck, and black net mittens, half-covering her bare arms, gave her something of a Spanish air. The Canoness, pleased to see her looking so well, completed her costume by presenting her with an elegant little fan, to be worn suspended at the wrist by a slender jet chain.

"Do you know how to use it?" she asked, helping her to fasten it on.

Nathalie began fanning herself with assumed awkwardness.

"No, Petite, not so; — look at me;" and taking her own fan, she used it with slow and stately grace; for Aunt Radegonde, having lived in the days when fanning was in all its glory, piqued herself on possessing the traditions of that well-nigh lost art.

"Yes, it is already better," she added, as Nathalie made another attempt; "but you do it too fast — try again; walk up and down the room, fan yourself, and look as Spanish as you can."

Nathalie laughed, and complied. She paced the drawing-room to and fro, assuming that peculiar gait



which is said to characterize the women of Spain, and fanning herself with southern ease and vivacity. As every now and then she glanced over her shoulder at the Canoness, with half-mocking, half-alluring grace, she looked like one of those lovely, but far too earthly saints, such as the old Spanish masters delighted to paint from living models, suddenly stepped down, in all the warm colouring and vividness of life, from her gloomy canvas and tarnished frame, to bewitch poor mortals from their devotions. All this she did with the coquetry innate in southern women, a coquetry nothing can subdue — most provoking and yet ever irresistible, because frank, genuine, and without disguise. But Nathalie suddenly stopped short in her promenading; she dropped her fan — it would have fallen to the floor, but for the little jet chain — and looked transfixed. She had perceived Monsieur de Sainville, unseen till then, standing in the embrasure of one of the windows, with a newspaper in his hand; he seemed absorbed in his reading; probably he had not noticed her — she devoutly hoped so, on remembering how freely she had been displaying her graces. She gave the Canoness a look of silent reproach.

"Petite," suddenly asked Aunt Radegonde, without heeding this, "why do you not wear the velvet I gave you?"

"I have lost it," was the embarrassed reply.

"Lost it! When, and how?"

"Out — on the day of the storm."

"Petite, how could the storm make you lose it?"

"My hair got wet, and I unfastened it."

"Unfastened your hair in the storm!"

"Was there a silver edging to it?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, looking up.

"Yes; did you find it, Armand?"

"I found such a velvet."

"Where?" asked his inquisitive aunt.

Nathalie gave him an alarmed look. She knew where the velvet was lost — where she had uselessly looked for it. He smiled, and said, quietly:

"Aunt, I fear you will be angry, when I tell you that I have been using your gift to Mademoiselle Montolieu as a book-marker, and that the silver has become tarnished."

"Using Petite's velvet as a book-marker!" indignantly exclaimed his aunt.

"Well, if Mademoiselle Montolieu wishes for it —"

"Do you imagine she is going to wear your book-marker?" hotly interrupted the Canoness.

"Aunt, I hear the music."

"And you want us to leave you to your politics?" she pettishly said.

He silently resumed his reading as they left the room.

"Oh, Marraine!" reproachfully observed Nathalie in the garden, "how could you make me go on so foolishly whilst Monsieur de Sainville was there?"

"You surely do not think he took any notice of you?" replied the Canoness, innocently looking up into her face.

"Well, but he might," answered Nathalie, colouring a little.

"Petite, Armand is courteous to women, as a gentleman should be; but though he notices character, I acquit him of caring for either the dress or good

looks of young girls. See, how he never knew that velvet to be yours! *A-propos*, where did you lose it?"

But they had crossed the garden, and were entering the grounds, which were already filled with guests, laughing, mirth, and music. Nathalie took advantage of this not to reply.

"*Oh! mon Dieu!* what a pretty sight!" she exclaimed, looking and feeling delighted. "How gay and cheerful those many-coloured dresses look on the green! What a lovely afternoon! Why is there not a fête every day in the year? It is so pleasant to enjoy one's self and be happy."

"Petite, what are those white things there beyond?"

"Awnings, Marraine, — snow-white awnings, spreading in the cool green shade, with here and there a warm sun-ray gliding through. That little tent standing apart is for the refreshments. I ran out just before they opened the gates, to have a peep: it looked beautiful. Fruits, in all their bloom and beauty, and of every warm, sunny hue, rose in pyramids, in wide porcelain baskets, and looked almost too fresh and exquisite to touch."

"Were there any cakes or creams?" asked the Canoness, who had a spice of *gourmandise* in her composition.

"I did not mind. Cakes and creams are pretty, but not poetical."

"They are a great deal better than poetical. Was there any nougât? I like it. Let us try at once before it is all gone. Come, Petite," she added, with an air of  *finesse*, "let us go to that pretty tent, take

some nougât and a cream, and eat them in some quiet, shady place, far from all this noise and bustle."

Nathalie gave a wistful look at the dancers under the large awning; but there was nothing selfish, even in her most ardent longing after pleasure, and, without a murmur, she accompanied her old friend.

All the *bourgeois* of Sainville and the environs had come, with their wives and daughters, to see the grounds, to criticize what they saw, and enjoy themselves, in spite of all that. There were also a few ladies from the surrounding châteaux, and plenty of gentlemen, who thought the young *bourgeoises* very pretty, though somewhat prim and sedate.

The place was thronged, yet, thanks to the admirable instinct of French crowds, there was not the least confusion. Nathalie and her companion kept somewhat aloof, and followed a shady path, whence they could see all that passed on the lawn. The young girl several times caught a view of Madame Marceau, who sailed through the crowd with majestic grace, with a smile for some, a word to others, and to all kind glances. She felt elated, triumphant; and looked like a dark, handsome queen, imperious even in her very blindest courtesy. Nathalie could not help admiring her, and observing to her companion that Madame Marceau was a very fine woman.

"Rather too tall," replied the Canoness. "After all, my dear, it is we, and those like us, that are *the* women."

Nathalie smiled archly. She was of that elegant height to which there is nothing to add, but from which there is also nothing to take away. Aunt Radegonde, though decidedly short, laboured under the agreeable

delusion that her height was the standard height of woman, and used the pronoun *we* with perfect confidence. They soon reached the tent. The Canoness selected her favourite dainties, and made a servant follow them with a tray, until they reached a cool, shady nook, where they sat down at the foot of a beech, and began, as she said, "to enjoy themselves." Nathalie consoled herself by listening to the music, and now and then catching a glimpse of the dancers through the trees.

The Canoness liked to enjoy good things slowly. She was long about the nougât, and longer still about the creams. Though Nathalie remained patient and cheerful, she could not help giving an occasional look at the distant fête, and drawing to it the attention of Aunt Radegonde.

"Oh! Marraine!" she exclaimed, admiringly; "do look at those dancers there beyond. How well they keep time to the music, and sink or rise together! Dancing is beautiful; I admire it; I have always admired it; there is something in it that reminds one of astronomy."

"Astronomy, Petite?"

"Yes, indeed, for I half believe in the music of the spheres; and the harmonious motion of sun, earth, moon, and planets, with their myriads of worlds, always seemed to me like a magnificent dance on a grand scale. Comets are those erratic dancers whom neither time nor measure can keep quiet, and fixed stars are holy nuns, who have looked on from afar, and who, poor things! must still look on, throughout eternity."

"Well, Petite, you will be no fixed star by-and-

by. But is it not pleasant to be sitting here in the shade, enjoying our little collation?"

Too candid to say "yes," Nathalie smiled, and the Canoness, who had some of the latent selfishness which often accompanies a certain species of good-nature, interpreted the smile as one of unequivocal assent. Their "little collation" was over, but she felt "meditative;" and in her vocabulary, to be meditative signified to be drowsy. They were sitting on a grassy slope at the foot of a large beech; she drew nearer to the trunk of the tree and leaning against it prepared to meditate. At first Nathalie felt dismayed. She knew that the reflective moods of Aunt Radegonde were long and deep; but it seemed a hopeless case; and so, with a sigh given to the distant dancing, she sat down by her old friend, smoothed and settled her silk skirts, and encircling her little waist with one arm, told her to take her shoulder as a pillow. After some coquetting, the Canoness accepted, and laid her head on the firm and smooth support offered to her; she looked flushed, and complained of the heat; Nathalie began fanning her softly; in less than a minute Aunt Radegonde was fast asleep.

This spot, though not far from the lawn, was both shady and retired, and no one came to disturb the two ladies. But after some minutes had elapsed a gentleman slowly walked up the quiet path and paused, unseen and unheard, within a few paces of the beech-tree. The Canoness still slept peacefully, but her head had half-glided from the shoulder to the bosom of the young girl, who, to support her more conveniently, now leaned on one elbow, and half reclined on the grassy slope. She still fanned her old friend, but

slowly and abstractedly; it was evident that her thoughts were elsewhere; every now and then she started slightly as the sounds of the fête reached her ear, and her right foot, half peeping from the ample folds of her white dress, beat time to the distant music. As they both lay there together, in the cool, shady light, with many a queer depth and many a winding path around and behind them, he who gazed remembered a long-forgotten tale of his childhood, and thought that Nathalie looked not unlike the poor Princess sighing for freedom with all its joys, whilst the Canoness answered to the loving but jealous little fairy, who still kept her bound to her side by some strange magic spell.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said Monsieur de Sainville, for it was he, "I thought you liked dancing?"

Nathalie looked up, coloured a little, and raising herself without awakening the Canoness, replied, with slight embarrassment, "that she liked it," and stooping over Aunt Radegonde, she fanned her assiduously. He leaned against a neighbouring tree, and began talking to her. Several times he glanced impatiently at his aunt, and once proposed to waken her. Nathalie refused, philosophically declaring "she did not care about the dancing." He smiled, and began teasing her pitilessly. Now he said, how merry the people looked as he passed through them; then he made her listen to the music, or gravely requested her to explain the various figures of the dance.

"Confess," he said, at length, bending forward to see her averted face, "confess you wish my aunt would awaken?"

"She was sure she did not care a bit," but in her vexation she fanned the Canoness very fast.

"*Mon Dieu!* what a breeze!" exclaimed Aunt Radegonde, with a sudden start.

Nathalie looked confused; but he was not minding her.

"Aunt," he seriously said, "how could you be so unkind as to deprive Mademoiselle Montolieu of the dancing, when she is so fond of it?"

The conscience of Aunt Radegonde already upbraided her, and she took this remark very ill. With a certain perverseness of judgment, in which she sometimes indulged, she now affected to consider everything her nephew said as an offence, not to herself, but to Nathalie, whom she defended with angry warmth.

"Do not meddle with Petite, Armand; she is nothing to you."

"I beg your pardon, she is my ward."

"Your ward!"

"Yes, indeed, my ward."

"Armand, take my advice, do not meddle with young girls — you are not always kind to them; and you, Petite, do not mind him, he only wants to make us quarrel: do not mind him, but kiss me."

She stopped short in the path, — for they were going towards the lawn — as she spoke, and giving an indignant look at her nephew, she turned towards the young girl, who was preparing to comply with a smile, when Monsieur de Sainville quietly stepped between her and his aunt, took her arm within his, and stooping composedly, laid his moustache on the cheek Aunt Radegonde had destined to the rosy lips of Nathalie."

"Aunt," said he, with a smile, "the quarrel is not



between you and Petite" — the word seemed to slip out unawares, — "but between you and me; and we must not quarrel to-day."

A genuine caress from her nephew was so rare. that the Canoness was immediately pacified. They soon reached the scene of the fête, and Monsieur de Sainville, though not without much trouble and seeking on his part, found them convenient places. There neither loud music, nor crowding dances could give annoyance; there the awning and sheltering trees over head yielded its deepest shade; and there, too, — not the least important point for Nathalie, — the ladies could not only see the dancing, but be seen themselves. No sooner were they seated, than numerous gentlemen gathered around Monsieur de Sainville, who remained standing near them; and invitations poured thick and fast on the pretty girl who sat by his aunt. Every time she wrote down on her fan the name of a new partner, Nathalie could not refrain from giving her host a triumphant smile, destined to avenge her of all she had endured beneath the beech-tree.

Dancing may be delightful, but it is neither amusing to look at, nor interesting to describe, unless in extraordinary cases. We shall not, therefore, expatiate on the dancing which afforded Nathalie so much delight, that every now and then, in the midst of her enjoyment, she could not help, like an amused child, looking over her shoulder towards the spot where she had left her old friend, upon which Aunt Radegonde never failed to give her an encouraging nod; and her nephew sometimes paused, in a conversation, to catch her look and smile. The first time, however,

that she returned to her seat, the Canoness seriously advised her to dance with less spirit and vivacity, "to do it more composedly, in short."

"I cannot," laughingly replied the young girl.

Here she felt some one stooping over her chair, and a kind voice whispered in her ear:

"Do not try; but enjoy yourself as much as you can, my child."

"What are you saying to her, Armand?" asked the Canoness.

Nathalie looked up, but he was gone.

The next time that Nathalie returned to the prudent Aunt Radegonde, she found her engaged in a close conversation with no less a personage than the Chevalier Théodore de Méranville-Louville. The Chevalier had the compassionate nature of the sex he adored; he had taken three tickets for the lottery, and purchased a card of admission to the fête. No one, who now saw him with snow-white cravat, diamond pin, and, above all, with an air so gallant and *dégagé*, could have suspected that these acts of munificence entailed a week's pinching economy on the kind-hearted dancing-master. He cared little, so long as appearances — modern honour — were saved. Amongst the dancers were some of his pupils; he wished to watch their progress, and encourage their efforts by his presence. He did not intend dancing himself: he did not think it fair. He felt in the case of a fencing-master, who cannot fight a duel, with his own weapons at least. Unable to obtain a front seat, he placed himself behind the Canoness; he was not tall, and she was short, which made it convenient. But at the moment when he was most intent in look-

ing over her head, a tall gentleman, passing by with hasty strides, pushed him rather rudely. Aunt Rade-gonde gave a little scream: the Chevalier remained aghast. He had been pushed, and pushed against a lady! His first impulse — for he was an irascible little man — was to rush after the tall gentleman, and chastise him on the instant; but a gentler feeling prevailed: he remained near the Canoness, who graciously assured him she was not hurt. "He feared this assurance proceeded only from her extreme goodness;" and, as he spoke, he gave the tall gentleman a look that said so plainly, "We shall meet again, Sir," that the Canoness, knowing to what dreadful extremities gentlemen jealous of their honour sometimes allowed themselves to be carried, and who, from the ribbon at his button-hole, took the dancing-master for an officer retired from active service, became much alarmed, and exerted herself to soothe his ruffled spirit. Need we say that the tall gentleman, who always remained unconscious of the offence he had committed, and the risk he had run, was forgotten for the fascinating Canoness. Their innocent flirtation had reached its highest point of flowery speech on one hand, and of graceful complaisance on the other. In a moment of *entraînement*, the Chevalier had even forgotten his scruples so far as to solicit the Canoness to favour him with a *contre-danse*, and she had declined on the score of being a Canoness; for, though some Canonesses did dance, she could not approve of it, when Nathalie came up, and greeted her old friend with smiling welcome.

This recognition led to an increase of harmony, flowery speeches, and general pleasantness. The

Chevalier made tender inquiries and gave minute information. Moral and intellectual cares weighed heavily on Mademoiselle Dantin, but strength of principle supported her through all. Nathalie, who felt happy and forgiving, smiled, and said she was glad to hear it. Days of pleasure pass rapidly; and when she saw the sun sinking in the west, and the dancers and groups on the lawn thinning gradually, this day seemed to the young girl to have been as brief and delightful as a dream. The Canoness, in whose monotonous existence the episode with the Chevalier formed a very agreeable incident, was beholding with equal regret the approach of evening, when a cold haughty voice observed by her side:

"Aunt, is it not growing cool?"

She looked round, and beheld her imperious niece; but the presence of strangers always infused a strong spirit of independence in Aunt Radegonde, who now quietly replied:

"Cool! Rosalie; I think it close;" and she fanned herself very coolly.

Madame Marceau gave her an astonished look; but she blandly said:

"My dear aunt, it is absolutely necessary that I should speak to you in private."

"I cannot leave Petite."

"Aunt," observed Madame Marceau, with her grandest air, "Mademoiselle Montolieu, or, indeed, any lady, is sufficiently protected by the mere fact of being here — the place is her shield."

The Canoness rose, but she still looked uncomfortable; the polite Chevalier partly relieved her, by pro-

missing to remain at Mademoiselle Montolieu's orders, in return for which, he received her warm thanks, and one of Madame Marceau's coolest glances.

When Nathalie returned to her seat, she found Madame Marceau waiting for her; her dark face now wore a look of secret triumph. Without giving the Chevalier time to speak, she said, in her most caressing tone:

"You must be tired, Petite; do come and rest, before dinner."

She drew the arm of the young girl within her own, and led her away to the spot where a raised bench, standing beneath a separate awning, had occasionally received her during the course of the day. Madame de Jussac, who had only just arrived, half lay at one end of the seat, fanning herself with her air of well-bred *ennui*; she welcomed Nathalie very graciously, and made room for her by her side. Madame Marceau sat down at the other end of the bench.

"Have you been amused?" softly asked Madame de Jussac.

"Oh! very much indeed," replied Nathalie, with the glow of pleasure still on her cheek.

"How well this Spanish sort of thing becomes you!" admiringly said Madame Marceau; "does it not, *ma chère*?"

"Before this evening, I never thought I could like the Spanish mantilla," quietly replied Madame de Jussac.

The young girl coloured, and looked wonderingly from one to the other lady. Madame Marceau gave her an approving nod; Madame de Jussac smiled blandly, and her look said, "Yes, indeed, you are *very* charming."

"You like dancing?" she observed aloud.

"I love it!" replied Nathalie with sparkling eyes.

"And when will you have another dance in this dull place, miserably dull for you!" sighed Madame Marceau.

"Miserably dull, Madame! Never since I left Provence have I been so happy, so free from care, as here!"

"What a negative happiness?" kindly objected Madame Marceau. "In the summer Sainville can do, but in the winter! Just imagine, *ma bonne*," she added, addressing Madame de Jussac across Nathalie; "no society, nothing but newspapers, walks — when there is neither snow, rain, nor wind; an odd game of piquet with my aunt, and my silent brother walking up and down the drawing-room, evening after evening."

"Lamentable!" said Madame de Jussac, yawning slightly.

"I should like it," quietly observed Nathalie.

"Like it!" sharply echoed Madame Marceau.

"Yes, is there not a dreamy charm, or soothing repose in such a life?"

"I beg your pardon; I thought you liked pleasure?"

"Whilst it lasts! but to-morrow this place will seem empty; I shall miss the dance, — the music, — the faces, — the excitement."

"And pleasures should succeed one another too rapidly for reaction to have time to come. Quite the opinion of Madame de Méris, who will never allow this depressing reaction to come near you or her daughters."

Madame de Jussac spoke very quietly, but Nathalie fastened on her a look of such perfect astonishment, that the lady opened her own fine blue eyes very wide,

and half raising herself up, exclaimed with something approaching vivacity:

"Is this an indiscretion? It is your fault, Rosalie," she added, reproachfully glancing at her friend, "you should have checked me. *Ma foi, tant pis pour vous.*" She sank back into her old attitude with indolent and careless grace.

What did all this mean? Nathalie turned towards Madame Marceau: it was getting dark, but their looks met.

"Yes," she calmly said, "you have been a little indiscreet, *ma bonne*; but the mischief done is slight. You must know, my dear child," she added, taking and softly pressing Nathalie's hand, "that we do not think the mere fact of having you here, is a sufficient compensation for the painful past. No, we do not think so. More is due to you. Now it very fortunately happens, that the Marquise de Méris has asked her sister-in-law, Madame de Jussac, to find for her daughters — a companion, not a guide or governess, of their own age and temper; one is seventeen; the other eighteen; they are very gay, high-spirited girls. You will do admirably. Your sole task, my dear, will be to amuse yourself as well as you can; a task that becomes you charmingly. I do not speak of the other matters: suffice it to say, that Madame de Méris has a princely fortune, and spends it with princely grace. I need not say how grieved we are at parting with you, but we sacrifice our own feelings to your good. The manner in which you enjoyed this solitary day of pleasure proves to us that it would be cruel and selfish to detain you here. We will not do so. You will see Madame de Méris at dinner this evening. She

spends the night here, and is so anxious to have you, that she talks of taking you away with her to-morrow. But I scarcely think we can spare you so soon." She spoke quite affectionately. A slight nervous tremour shook the hand which she still held, but the young girl never opened her lips.

"Do you know that Madame de Méris has taken a box at both Operas?" carelessly said Madame de Jussac.

"Indeed!" observed Madame Marceau, "she is fond of music?"

"Passionately!"

"How fortunate! Mademoiselle Montolieu sings charmingly."

"Fortunate, indeed! Eliza gives such exquisite little amateur concerts. But perhaps Mademoiselle's voice is a soprano?" she added in a tone of apprehension.

"No! it is a very fine contralto voice."

Madame de Jussac was delighted. A soprano voice would have been good; but a contralto was invaluable. Madame de Méris had been longing for a contralto. After dwelling a little longer on this topic, the conversation took another turn; the balls which Madame de Méris gave, those to which she went, and to which Nathalie would of course accompany her and her daughters; the company they received, — the delightful Tuesdays they had, — the magnificent châteaux they possessed in various provinces, — the splendid and luxurious life they led, were all carelessly mentioned in turn. And as Madame de Jussac explained, Madame Marceau admired, and Nathalie sat pale and silent between both.



"So Madame de Méris is as gay as ever," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville, who, whilst they were thus engaged, had come up, unperceived, and now joined in the conversation.

There was a brief pause. Nathalie started slightly, and looked up. Madame Marceau cast a rapid and anxious look at her brother; he stood facing her at the other end of the seat, partly leaning over the indolent Madame de Jussac, who merely turned up her eyes, to observe, languidly:

"Does the fan annoy you?"

"Not in the least."

"Ah! I am glad of it." She resumed her favourite occupation, one moment interrupted.

The heart of Nathalie was beating fast; her colour came and went; she trembled visibly. It was well for her that evening was closing in; but the two ladies, between whom she sat, might have braved the light of sun or lamp. The pride of the one, the composure of the other, defied scrutiny.

"So Madame de Méris is as gay as ever?" again said Monsieur de Sainville, speaking in precisely the same tone as before.

Madame de Jussac smiled assent.

"You will like her so much, *chère Petite*," calmly observed Madame Marceau, turning to Nathalie.

"Then when she said *we*, she meant that he knew and approved this," thought Nathalie; whilst a keen pang shot through her heart.

"She means to spend this winter in Paris, I believe?" he quietly continued.

"Yes, in Paris," replied Madame de Jussac, with perfect tranquillity.

"What a delightful change for you, Petite, — from dull Sainville to gay Paris!" exclaimed Madame Marceau.

Nathalie did not reply.

"Are you fond of change?" asked Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie made an effort to reply that she liked change very much.

"Then I suppose you will be glad to see Paris?" he continued.

She supposed so.

"How very provoking!" he resumed, with his peculiar smile. "I am grieved to be the bearer of painful tidings; but it is unfortunately too true that you will not see Paris this winter."

"What! Is not Madame de Méris going?" asked Madame Marceau, thrown off her guard.

"Yes, I believe she is going," was the calm reply.

"Then why may not Mademoiselle Montolieu see Paris this winter?" inquired his sister once more, quite composed.

"Because Mademoiselle Montolieu will spend this winter at Sainville."

"You wish it!" exclaimed Madame Marceau, with a fiery look in the direction of Nathalie.

"I protest against Mademoiselle Montolieu having any voice in this matter," said Monsieur de Sainville, with provoking composure. "What chance has our dull home against the syren city? Besides, being an interested party, she has no right to decide in her own case."

"Then you are judge in this matter!" bitterly re-

marked Madame Marceau, applying her vinaigrette as she spoke: "Judge and jury."

"No; I merely represent my aunt, who bids Mademoiselle Montolieu leave at her peril."

Madame Marceau indignantly fanned herself with her pocket-handkerchief.

"My aunt agreed a while ago," she said, shortly.

"Yes; but she has changed her mind since."

"She will reconsider the matter, Armand."

"I do not think so."

"My aunt is not so selfish as to wish to immure Mademoiselle Montolieu in this dull place."

"Selfishness is so ingenious! My aunt persists in declaring that Mademoiselle Montolieu prefers Sainville to Paris."

"Armand!" exclaimed Madame Marceau, in a tone of stately surprise, "you cannot mean to say our aunt dreams of detaining Mademoiselle Montolieu against her will?"

Without answering his sister, Monsieur de Sainville turned towards Nathalie, and remarked, in his tranquil way:

"Do not trust to the delusive hopes my sister holds out. My aunt declares you have passed your word to spend the winter here with her; she leaves you no other alternative, save to remain, or break your word by going. As to changing her fixed resolve, it is out of the question; — we are a wilful race?"

Nathalie looked up, and as she did so, she detected the glance which passed between Madame Marceau and her brother — angry confusion on her side; calm, inflexible will, on his. All this tacit plotting, coun-

ter-plotting, and polite quarrelling, was so much out of the young girl's way, so foreign to anything which had yet come within her experience, that she knew not how to act. She had not the patience and worldly knowledge that can guide safely through the treacherous breakers of undefined conventionalities, and fearful of compromising her dignity and her pride, she had for once the wisdom and prudence to remain silent.

"Armand," observed Madame Marceau, after a pause, and now speaking very calmly, "has my aunt reflected that Madame de Méris has also a claim over Mademoiselle Montolieu — that she will be hurt, and, above all, deeply disappointed?"

"Be quite easy, Rosalie," replied her brother, with slight irony; "I took it on myself to break the matter to Madame de Méris; and I am happy to say she bore the painful tidings with all the fortitude of a woman of the world."

"How cool it is getting," said Madame de Jussac, with a shiver. "Monsieur de Sainville, will you be kind enough to let me take your arm?"

She rose as she spoke: he silently complied with the lady's request. Nathalie watched them walking away with a beating heart. Madame Marceau still sat near her. She was an imperious lady; her will had been thwarted; what would she not say, in her anger? She said nothing, but watched the figures of her brother and Madame de Jussac, as they slowly vanished in the winding path they had taken. When they were no longer to be seen, she rose, with majestic pride, wrapped her fine figure in her magnificent shawl, and brushed past the young girl, in haughty

silence. Nathalie remained alone. She felt this slight more keenly perhaps than anything else; she could forgive the scheme for sending her away — the proud lady did not know how little she cared for her son — but to punish and slight her because that scheme happened to be defeated, was cruel and ungenerous. She had suffered acutely during the last half-hour, and bowing her face in her hands, she now wept silently. A sound near her made her raise her head; she looked up, and saw Monsieur de Sainville, who had returned, and now sat down by her side.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"You are weeping," said he; "why so?"

"I am not weeping," she replied, with slight equivocation.

"But you were: the tears are still on your cheek. Why is this? No reply! I will tell you why you weep: it is because you feel you have not been well used; and, indeed, you have not."

Nathalie looked at him. His face was severe, but she felt its severity was not for her.

"My poor child," he resumed, speaking very kindly, "do not take this to heart; if my sister knew even what I know, she would not act thus. I once mentioned her views to you, and I told her what you told me; but I perceive she labours under the impression, that no woman in her senses can remain indifferent to the love and admiration of her son."

Nathalie smiled scornfully; he saw it, and continued:

"Without knowing the exact state of your feel-

ings, I am, nevertheless, inclined to believe her mistaken."

There was a pause; Nathalie did not speak.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," he said, very seriously, "have you a great objection to tell me what you refused to tell Charles the other evening: namely, what you feel for him?"

She seemed to hesitate.

"I will tell you," she said, at length, "if I may be quite frank."

"As frank as you wish: it is your friend, not the uncle of Charles, who listens."

"Sir," she resumed, "your nephew is handsome, I do not deny it; there is talent in his face. I believe him clever; as your nephew, he is much higher in station than any man who will ever think of marrying me: he probably will have much wealth, and if he has persecuted me with his attentions, I cannot but confess to myself, that it must be because he is much in love —"

She stopped short, and coloured deeply, as he who looked could see, in spite of the obscurity.

"Well?" he said, with his look still full on her face.

"You will not think what I am going to tell you strange?" she asked, hesitatingly.

"Strange!" he echoed, a little sadly; "my poor child, in those matters I think nothing strange."

"Well, then," she rejoined, pressing her right hand to her heart, and speaking very earnestly, "I feel here in a manner I understand very well, but cannot explain, that I shall never love, or even like him."

There was a pause.

"Why so?" he at length asked.

"Because, without imputing evil to him, I do not think him good."

"My dear child, are you so romantic as to expect perfection?"

"No; for I am far from being perfect myself."

"Besides," he continued, very seriously, "remember this great truth — the being who loves, is certainly, for the time that he or she loves, good."

"Sir," said Nathalie, quite as seriously, "do you think that Monsieur Marceau feels anything like genuine tenderness or affection for me? Do you think that, if I had the small-pox, for instance, he would ever care to see me again? Because, if you think so," she added, after a brief pause, "I do not."

He said nothing: he was secretly wondering at the intuitive, but unerring tact with which this seemingly heedless girl had arrived at the distinction between passion and tenderness.

"I thank you truly for your frankness and confidence," he observed at length. "If I asked this question, it was, with your permission, to satisfy my sister, without telling her that which it would hurt her maternal feelings to hear, — that her fears were wholly groundless."

"You may do, Sir, as you wish."

"And you will spend the winter here?"

She shook her head gravely.

"No, Sir; I have had too clear a proof to-night of what I suspected, before I had been two days here — namely, that I was not in the house of Madame Marceau, but in that of Monsieur de Sainville; not with her will, but through his."

“And is Mademoiselle Montolieu too proud to allow Monsieur de Sainville the pleasure of considering her his guest?” he asked very kindly.

“Oh, no; not too proud,” replied the poor girl, with tears in her eyes and in her voice; “it is not fair to call that pride.”

She was evidently much depressed. Her head drooped on her bosom, her hands lay clasped upon her lap; she looked pale in the light of the rising moon. There was sadness even in her attitude. He remembered her in the joyous mood of the afternoon, gay, smiling, and bright; with her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks flushed from the excitement of the dance: the contrast pained him.

“What is it then?” he asked soothingly.

“The sense of my own dignity, which I am alone to guard,” she firmly replied, looking up.

“I respect your scruples; but if my sister, herself, asks you to stay, will you not do so?”

Nathalie shook her head again.

“I know, Sir, that you have a strong will, and that every one in this house obeys it, but I do not wish it to be exercised for me.” — He smiled and did not seem offended at the imputation of wilfulness, — far from it; but he quietly assured her, that as soon as he could explain the matter to her, Madame Marceau would of her own accord offer to repair her injustice; and he pledged his word to the young girl, not to insist on her remaining unless it happened exactly so. Still Nathalie did not seem convinced.

“*Allons*,” he observed with a dissatisfied smile, “I perceive Sainville is dull, and Paris irresistible.”



"Indeed I do not care for Paris!" quickly replied Nathalie, pained at this reproach.

He looked incredulous.

"Upon my word!" she said, with ingenuous earnestness.

"What! you do not care for a life of pleasure, of balls, dances, plays, and so forth?" he inquired with his keen look.

"Indeed, I do not. Besides, there is dancing here also."

"Then my child," he remarked, in his usual tone, "do not think of going with Madame de Méris. She is gay, thoughtless; unfit to protect any young girl."

"Has she not daughters, Sir?"

"Two, on whom nature has bestowed an excellent safeguard, and to whom fortune has moreover granted the protection of large dowries."

"I can protect myself," returned Nathalie with some pride.

"From wrong, I believe you; from annoyance, allow me to doubt it. Besides, for reasons not offensive to you, but useless to mention, I am convinced that Madame de Méris, willing to oblige my sister as she is, would very soon regret having accepted you as the companion of her daughters."

"And why so?" asked Nathalie, rather offended.

"Because," he replied, with a smile, "they are very plain."

"Ah!" she said, a little disconcerted.

"Well," he resumed, "have I convinced you?"

"I have another objection."

"Another!"

"Yes, Sir, another. Why should I stay here, and

by my presence, deprive Madame Marceau of her son's society?"

"I might answer to this, that as you are innocent and as he is culpable, it is only just he should suffer; but you would raise some other objection. Suffice it then to mention, that my sister is ambitious for her son; that she is very glad of a pretence to keep him away at his studies; and that to prevent him from losing his time in the province, she intends spending part of the winter in Paris. Have you any other objection?"

Nathalie looked at him very seriously.

"Sir," she said, "I will abide by your decision, for I have faith in your judgment and good feeling. But if you had a daughter, situated as I am, would you as her father —"

"Pray do not use that comparison," he interrupted, looking up and unable to repress a smile, "I am an old bachelor; the fatherly instinct is most imperfectly developed in me; I give you my word I have no idea how, as your father, I would, or ought to behave in such a matter."

"Well, then, if you had a sister," resumed Nathalie, slightly disconcerted.

"I have a sister," he replied, with some gloom.

"I beg your pardon, I understand," very hastily rejoined Nathalie, rising as she spoke.

"You impatient child, you do not understand at all," said he gently, compelling her to resume her seat; "you take fire on a word. Little credit as you give me for feeling, give me credit for common politeness. I disclaimed your comparison, because it rested on an impossible relationship. Have you then for-

gotten that I am your guardian, and that of your own accord you once called me your friend? Why did you not appeal to the friend and guardian?"

"And what would his answer have been?" asked Nathalie, looking up.

"Remain!"

"Then I will," she exclaimed, yielding to an irresistible impulse, "for I believe, Sir, that you are my friend; yes, my friend indeed!"

In a fit of southern fervour she took his hand and raised it so that it touched her lips, but she dropped it almost immediately, and rose from the seat pale and frightened at her own indiscretion. All that Mademoiselle Dantin had ever urged on feminine propriety rushed back to her mind to alarm her; as for any other feeling, save one of pure and grateful emotion, such as a very child might have felt, her conscience acquitted her of it, and though she was much mortified, she felt no shame.

Monsieur de Sainville had not moved, and as he sat in the shade she could not read the expression of his features. There was a brief and embarrassed pause.

"I see you wish to go in," he quietly observed, rising, and taking her arm as he spoke.

Nathalie did not answer, but, looking around her, she perceived that the grounds were almost solitary, and felt somewhat surprised at not having noticed this before. They walked home in profound silence. In her first terror of being misconstrued, she longed to explain, but her pride revolted against it.

"No," she thought, "if he has so little tact and delicacy as not to perceive that I was only foolish, let him think all he likes."

They had entered the château, and stood in the lighted hall, as she came to this conclusion. She could not resist the temptation of looking up into his face as they parted. He seemed so calm and friendly, that a weight was immediately removed from her mind. She felt that she had not been misunderstood; that her fear was an act of injustice to herself; above all, of injustice to him.

She went up to her room, and abstained from appearing at the late and large dinner which was to precede the lottery. She sat near her open window, thinking, when a gentle tap at her room door roused her from her abstraction. It was Aunt Radegonde come to fetch her. She began by dwelling pathetically on the shock Nathalie's projected departure had given her.

"Oh! Petite," she concluded, with a sigh, "how glad I am that Armand did interfere! It is very selfish, of course, for me to wish you to remain here, and so Rosalie told me; still I cannot help it. I cannot help being delighted at your staying, and am very grateful to Armand, who, for my sake, made it all right again. Well, are you coming? the lottery has already begun."

Nathalie pleaded a headache.

"We shall keep out of the noise in the little back drawing-room; the folding-doors have been taken down, and there is a handsome velvet drapery instead. Armand said it would be better for us to stay there, and that he would take care of my tickets for me. You must come. He is quite vexed because you were not present at the dinner. He sent me up to fetch you, saying, he knew you would not mind a ser-

vant's message, but that you could not refuse me. He added that he, your guardian, summoned you to make your appearance below; and though I think myself it is rather ridiculous for him to persist in claiming you as his ward, still he has been so good to-day, that we must indulge him a little. Just take off that mantilla, if you like; your dress will do very well."

Nathalie at length yielded to her arguments, and accompanied her down stairs. Madame Marceau had invited about forty or fifty select guests to be present at the drawing of the lottery. They were chiefly persons whose political connexions and influence might be useful to her brother in the approaching elections. A few belonged to the provincial aristocracy; by far the greater number were of the wealthy *bourgeoisie*. After skilfully agitating amongst their inferior brethren in the afternoon's fête, she had reserved these for the evening's seductions. About twenty of the most influential had come to dinner. The saloon was brilliantly lit up, and as there were many well-dressed women, it looked gay and pretty; but Madame Marceau had done everything to avoid éclat; she wished this to appear what she repeatedly called it, — "a little domestic fête and familiar réunion."

The lottery was already far advanced when the two ladies entered. At one end of the drawing-room, stood a small table, with a silver urn, from which a young and pretty girl, the daughter of the Prefect, gravely drew forth, one after another, small scrolls of paper, rolled like ancient papyrus manuscripts; on each of these scrolls was inscribed the number of a

ticket, to which capricious Fortune sometimes adjudged a prize, and oftener a blank. Another table, much larger, stood facing this; it was covered with the prizes, which the elder sister of the first young girl graciously distributed to the winners. Both tables were surrounded by animated groups, talking and laughing with French vivacity. Nathalie only caught a glimpse of this scene, through which the Canoness hurried her.

"It is much pleasanter here, is it not?" she observed, drawing aside the velvet drapery, which fell once more in dark and heavy folds behind them.

The little saloon had been tastily fitted up as a sort of cool retreat, which Madame Marceau had destined to her political *têtes-à-têtes*; little anticipating that it would be occupied by her aunt and Nathalie. It was redolent with the fragrance of exquisite flowers and shrubs; a solitary lamp, suspended from the ceiling, shed around a pale, trembling ray, which scarcely dispelled the mysterious twilight of the place. Madame Marceau and her friend sat on a low divan; Monsieur de Sainville stood near them. No one else was present. On perceiving Nathalie, Madame Marceau called up her most gracious smile, rose, went up to her, and took her hand.

"*Chère Petite*," she said, "you look pale. Are you tired? Do you know, I think you are too delicate a great deal for the excitement of pleasure?"

"If you had seen her dancing, you would not think so," decisively interrupted Aunt Radegonde.

Madame Marceau gave her aunt a significant look; but the Canoness neither took nor understood the hint.

"Indeed, aunt," resumed the lady, "Mademoiselle Montolieu is more delicate than you think; and I begin to imagine that the country air is not only quite necessary to her, but that Paris —"

"I tell you she is not delicate at all," again interrupted Aunt Radegonde, now speaking rather indignantly.

Madame Marceau saw her aunt would spoil all, if she continued to dwell on this theme; she therefore observed, in a wholly altered tone, and slightly drawing herself up to speak with suitable dignity:

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, we are friends; indeed, we have never ceased to be so. Yes," she continued, lowering her voice, and speaking with affected discretion, but not so low as not to be heard from the divan, "I feel now that we are friends, beyond the power of misunderstanding. I am sorry not to have sought myself the clear explanation which my brother, with his prompt judgment, perceived to be necessary. I need not tell you how I admire your resolve, — the result of a prudence and high principle almost above your years. Still less need I tell you how sincerely I hope our dull house may long be your home."

She pressed her hand, beckoned to her friend, and left the place. Monsieur de Sainville waited until the velvet drapery had fallen upon them to approach Nathalie, and say, in a low tone:

"Are you content?"

"Yes, Sir, I am."

He left them.

Monsieur de Sainville had taken an early opportunity to inform his sister that Nathalie had pledged herself never to become the wife of Charles Marceau.

More than this he had not said; nor had she asked to know more. Satisfied with this assurance, and anxious to please her brother, with whom she felt she had already ventured farther than was either prudent or expedient, Madame Marceau had immediately exclaimed "that she felt the greatest regard for Mademoiselle Montolieu, and would, in her dear Armand's presence, ask her to stay." To which her dear Armand, without thinking it necessary to inform her that she had unconsciously suggested the only condition on which Nathalie would now remain, had quietly replied:

"Indeed, Rosalie, you will please me very much by doing so."

"Please him! Why had he not said so at once? Was there anything she wished more than to please him? But he was so unkind; he would not let her know what pleased him! She guessed sometimes" — this was a hint for the elections — "and other times she failed; all because he was so reserved with his poor Rosalie."

Before, however, making this concession, Madame Marceau had prudently dropped a few hints to her friend. She had feelingly deplored the hardships of certain positions, which, in violence to the heart's better feelings, often compelled one to act with seeming unkindness. When a young man of fortune and family took a fancy to a pretty face, it was very difficult to guess that the individual thus distinguished had sufficient humility and principle not to be dazzled, and mistake what was only a passing caprice for a serious attachment; and hard to imagine that, on being properly appealed to, this individual could solemnly



pledge herself never to enter into a secret or open engagement with the infatuated youth. Madame de Jussac, who heard her with a smile, assured her that she was not so much astonished; she had heard of such things, and found nothing incredible in the present case. But Madame Marceau, resolved she should be satisfied that it was really so, had taken care to make her assist at the explanation, which she had worded so that it might please both her brother and the mother of her in whom she still hoped to see the future bride of Charles. For though Nathalie was to spend this winter in Sainville, Madame Marceau by no means contemplated her prolonged sojourn as either desirable or proper, and did not apprehend the want of a convenient pretence, whenever the time arrived, for her to go in earnest.

Aunt Radegonde did not look much pleased when her nephew left them to the seclusion of the little saloon. "He might have stayed; but, thank heaven, they could do without him, — and without any one else, too. This was a nice quiet place; yet, if Nathalie preferred the drawing-room, they would go in."

Nathalie assured her that she preferred this retired spot; they remained; few came to disturb their seclusion, or paid them more than passing visits. The Canoness drew the divan near the drapery, and slightly drawing this aside, fastened it so that, whilst remaining in its deep shadow, they could see and hear almost all that passed in the drawing-room. Nathalie looked and listened, but she could fix her attention on nothing. Whilst the childish voice of the young girl near the silver urn read scroll after scroll, and exclamations of affected triumph, and still more affected disappointment, greeted her announcements of gain or

loss, her memory wandered back to the incidents of the afternoon. Now she saw herself lying under the beech-tree; then she heard once more the music of the dance, or suddenly found herself sitting alone with Monsieur de Sainville, and hearing his melancholy voice say to her, "Strange! in those matters, I think nothing strange." She looked for him amongst the guests; he sat by Madame de Jussac; not a word of their conversation reached her ear; but though they smiled, she knew it was not friendly; in vain the lady seemed to pour forth her softest blandishments; something stern in his face, which Nathalie knew very well, remained still to show that he disowned her power. From them, Nathalie's glance wandered to other groups; but her head throbbed and burned; the glaring light annoyed her; she soon drew back into the shade, and heard, without heeding, the remarks of Aunt Rade-gonde, blending with the hum of the many conversations in the drawing-room. About an hour had thus elapsed, when the Canoness exclaimed:

"The lottery is over, and here is Armand coming, with our prizes."

The divan was immediately restored to its former place, as Monsieur de Sainville entered, followed by a servant, carrying a small tray, on which appeared the prizes, by no means numerous. The servant placed the tray on a small table near the divan, and retired.

"Aunt," said Monsieur de Sainville, opening his pocket-book, "I took charge of your fifteen tickets — I also attended to my own — forty in all. Less prudent than you, I allowed myself to be victimized to the extent of twenty-five tickets, at the price of two

francs each. Well, aunt, my deliberate conclusion is, that of all the cheating transactions I ever witnessed, and I have seen a good many, a charitable lottery is the most barefaced,"

"What! Armand; was there not fair play?"

"No. I acquit the individuals, but I accuse the system; it is founded, from beginning to end, on victimizing, which falls chiefly on my unfortunate sex. Ladies get up these things, and seduce their male friends into the purchase of tickets, for which they work prizes, which being all essentially feminine articles, are useless when won, and therefore return to them as presents; we pay and do the real charity — always deluded into the belief that we shall get our money's worth — they obtain all the praise."

"Armand," impatiently said his aunt, "do tell us what we have got? The first five tickets are for Petite."

"The first five tickets were blanks."

"Poor child!" observed the Canoness, turning towards Nathalie; "you shall share my better fortune."

"The next ten tickets obtained one prize."

"One! only one! and what was it?"

"A cigar-case. Here it is."

"A cigar-case!" exclaimed Aunt Radegonde; "and what am I to do with a cigar-case?"

"Anything you like, aunt, provided you do not offer it to me."

"Well, Armand, what did your twenty-five tickets get?"

"Three prizes, essentially feminine, of course, and one of them my own gift to the lottery. Here is a purse, aunt, which may not be of much use to you, but which you will value for the sake of the maker."

He dropped Nathalie's ridiculed purse in his aunt's lap, as he spoke.

"Have you got nothing for Petite, Armand?"

"Yes; this pair of Chinese slippers; I can warrant them genuine, for I brought them from Canton myself."

Nathalie thanked him, and looked delighted.

"What a pity they are so small," said the Canoness, taking up one of the slippers.

"They are not too small," promptly observed her nephew.

"Indeed they are, Armand."

"I assure you, aunt, they are not."

"How can you tell?"

"I know they are not too small."

"I never saw any one so dogmatic," impatiently said the Canoness; "but I am determined you shall not always have your way."

Before Nathalie could guess what she was going to do, or oppose, she put the slipper on the young girl's foot; she remained mute — it fitted.

"Well, aunt?" said Monsieur de Sainville, with a smile.

"Well — what about it?" sharply asked his aunt; "Petite does not want your ugly Chinese things: take them back."

She pushed the remaining slipper over to him; but Nathalie quickly snatched it back, on perceiving Monsieur de Sainville extending his hand to take it, and deliberately put it on: then looked at her feet with all the admiration of a child for its new toy.

"Take them off, Petite," said the Canoness: "ugly things, with their turned-up toes!"

Nathalie laughed, said they were original, and that she would wear them. The remonstrances of the Canoness induced her to take them off, but she persisted in keeping them. Aunt Radegonde, who was either domineered over, or domineering, looked peevish, until she remembered they had not yet seen the remaining prize. He produced it, a plain brown silk purse, which he intended keeping, because it was strong and safe. The Canoness looked triumphant: it was she who had begun that purse, and Petite who had finished it, "so that Monsieur Armand, after all his ridiculing, was glad to have something of their manufacture." Monsieur Armand indulged his aunt in her triumph, and sat down by her side. She reminded him once that he ought to appear in the drawing-room; but he quietly replied, "I am not host to-day — I am guest; I shall stay here: I prefer it."

He remained, and entered into a conversation with his aunt; but Nathalie, though usually attentive to his discourse, could not keep her mind fixed upon it now. The fatigue of the day weighed her down, and the vague sounds from the next room lulled her to sleep. At first she resisted; then, spite of all her efforts, her head became more and more heavy: the little saloon, with its flowery recesses, and pale lamp, seemed to float in a mist before her eyes; at length her lids closed, and she slept. Once she was half-awakened by the voice of Monsieur de Sainville, suddenly saying:

"Poor little thing! she has fallen asleep."

"Shall I awaken her, and take her to her room, Armand?" asked the voice of his aunt.

"Why so? she looks very comfortable thus."

"Then help me to put this cushion under her head."


Nathalie felt her head gently raised for a moment; the next it had sunk into the soft pillow placed beneath it, and she was once more in a deep slumber. She had slept thus for some time, when she suddenly awoke with the vague, undefined consciousness, that something — she knew not what — had happened. She looked up with a start; the sounds from the drawing-room had ceased: all in the little saloon was silent. The lamp still burned with its clear pale ray; the velvet drapery was slightly drawn aside, and in the opening stood the calm and handsome Madame de Jussac, looking like a vision, in her white silk dress. Nathalie eyed her with surprise; for the lady's languid face now wore a peculiar smile, half of irony, half of triumph. The young girl looked around her; the Canoness was peacefully nodding by her side. Where was Monsieur de Sainville? She turned slightly, and beheld him standing within a few paces of the divan. His face looked more dark and morose than she had seen it for many a day; it was at him Madame de Jussac looked; he returned her glance with evident *hauteur*.

"Have they been quarrelling?" thought Nathalie.

"What a charming place to meditate in," said the lady; "I do not wonder that a philosopher, a grave, reflective man, like you, should find it delightful."

"I suspect there has been more sleep here than meditation," said Madame Marceau, whose dark and smiling face now appeared over the shoulder of her friend.

"I did not sleep," said the Canoness, wakening up. Madame de Jussac smiled.



"Neither did your nephew," she said; "I found him engaged in a deep fit of musing."

"Politics!" observed Madame Marceau, coming in and looking very graciously at her brother; for the influential individuals whom she had that evening sounded, had entered into her views even more readily than she could in her warmest anticipations have hoped.

Nathalie perceiving that the guests were gone, rose and entered the front drawing-room; it was empty. Some of the lights were out; most had burned low; the floor was covered with fragments of the little scrolls; a few withered bouquets lay about; the whole room wore that disordered aspect so admirably conveyed in Hogarth's celebrated picture. Nathalie looked around her, and thought that those late pleasures had something dreary and hollow in all their gay brilliancy. Without seeking to listen, she overheard the close of a conversation between Madame Marceau and her brother in the little saloon.

"I cannot understand," he said in a dry, sharp voice, "how so absurd a rumour was propagated. No less than five persons mentioned it to me this evening as a current report. I, a candidate at the approaching elections! I, trying to become deputy: the mere idea is ridiculous."

"Monsieur de Sainville is above politics!" said the soft ironical voice of Madame de Jussac.

"Armand," asked his sister, in a low but distinct tone, "do you mean to say, that if a candidateship is offered to you, you will decline it?"

"I mean to say, that I shall decline it."

Nathalie heard Madame Marceau rise abruptly, and leave the little saloon with a quick hurried step. She

approached the table near which the young girl stood; took up a volume of engravings, turned over the pages with a trembling hand, then closed the book and pushed it away with angry haste. Nathalie looked at her with evident but unobserved wonder: there was no mistaking the meaning of the bent brow, flashing eyes and compressed lips; resentment, the deeper for its suppression, was in every haughty and quivering lineament. For a few minutes she stood there struggling against passion; at length her features became somewhat more composed; a chair was by her; she sat down with moody and abstracted glance. At the very moment when her schemes seemed near their fulfilment, her brother — their supposed instrument — stepped in and blasted them with a few haughty words. Twice in one evening had her haughty will to vail before his; the first disappointment had seemed light until this second deeper one gave it new bitterness. She felt baffled, irritated, and aggrieved; for years she had looked up to Monsieur de Sainville as the hope of her fallen fortunes; but now, she bitterly asked herself if, after being the good, he could not become the evil genius of her destiny.

She made an effort to smooth her brow, and look cheerful as Madame de Jussac drew near. The legitimist lady had never been in the secret of her political plans, and she flattered herself with the belief, that they were too deeply laid to be divined by her; to her great relief it was not her whom the lady addressed, but Nathalie.

"Mademoiselle Montolieu," said she, in her soft caressing voice, "I have been persuading our good



Canoness to come home with me to-morrow: of course you will accompany her?"

Nathalie was somewhat taken by surprise, but she quietly assented. Madame Marceau looked up with slight astonishment, soon succeeded by indifference. Her aunt and Nathalie might go where they liked: other thoughts occupied her.

"Come, Petite," said the Canoness, leaving the little saloon in her turn, "what are you doing here? Look, it is near one. Well, what do you want in there?" she added, as she saw Nathalie push the drapery aside; "the slippers! Why you do not want to wear them at night; ugly things!"

Without heeding her the young girl re-entered the little saloon. Monsieur de Sainville sat alone on the divan more morose than ever. He looked up and his look was not gracious.

"Have you forgotten anything?" he asked, in a brief tone.

"The slippers, Sir," she replied with a glance of surprise.

He had never addressed her thus before.

"Here they are." He handed them to her quickly, as if her presence importuned him.

Nathalie took them silently, but when she reached the drapery she suddenly came back. She remembered Madame de Jussac's invitation, and thought he might be offended about that.

"Sir," said she simply, "have I done anything wrong?"

He looked at her with evident surprise. She stood before him with serious, yet child-like grace, and he

could not help thinking, that none save a child would have asked such a question.

"You have done nothing wrong," he replied, in his usual tone; "but it is late, my aunt is waiting for you: good night."

## CHAPTER XVII.

AT an early hour on the following morning Madame de Jussac left, accompanied by the Canoness and her young companion. Her château was a few leagues away; Nathalie had often heard it mentioned as one of the most elegant and luxurious abodes in the province. She expected to be pleased, and was only disappointed; it was essentially a modern abode, and wealth could not replace the antique charm of Sainville.

The same disappointment awaited her in the pleasures which the château afforded; they were varied and frequent, but to Nathalie they seemed cold and monotonous. Thanks to the evident partiality of Madame de Jussac for her, she could not complain of neglect; indeed, she received great and very flattering attention; but she received it with indifference, for during the whole week that the visit lasted, she was a prey to *ennui*. "If this is good society," thought she, "I have enough of it." She found some pleasure, however, in walking in the garden. There was a high terrace, with marble vases filled with flowers, that reminded her of Sainville, and from which the old château was visible in the fine weather. She came there early in the morning, before the Canoness was up, and was generally joined by Madame de Jussac.

"You are looking for Sainville," said the lady to her, one morning, when she found her standing by the stone balustrade, with her look fastened on the horizon; "you cannot see it yet, the mist is too great; you seem to like Sainville."

"I like it very much."

"Yes, it is a pleasant place."

She took the young girl's arm; they walked up and down the lonely terrace; the lady spoke of Sainville and its inhabitants; Nathalie listened. The name of Charles Marceau happened to be mentioned, and Nathalie, with a heedlessness which she immediately repented, allowed Madame de Jussac to perceive that the intended marriage between the young man and her daughter was known to her. Madame de Jussac looked amused.

"So, my dear child," she said, smiling, "you really have believed that a daughter of mine would one day be Madame Charles Marceau."

Nathalie looked disconcerted, Madame de Jussac kindly assured her she was not in the least offended, though the idea had certainly amused her. She then proceeded to an analysis of her friend's son, from which it appeared that Charles was ignorant and presumptuous, without either the name or position which could induce even the most kindly disposed to overlook those disadvantages.

"Is he not to take the name of De Sainville, and is he not his uncle's heir?" asked Nathalie.

Madame de Jussac gave her a penetrating glance, and asked her, with a smile, if she believed this. Nathalie quietly assured her that she did; upon which Madame de Jussac composedly replied that

she did not think so. She spoke like one who knew more than she said.

"The only real claim of Monsieur Charles Marceau on attention," she resumed, after a pause, "is that he chances to be the nephew of a gentleman who might, if he wished, be the first man of this district, and indeed of the province; but who, spite of the haughty inaction to which he condemns himself, is, nevertheless, a very remarkable man."

Nathalie heard her with surprise, but she was destined to be more astonished still. Madame de Jussac, with a freedom from pique and resentment which charmed her listener, proceeded to draw a highly-coloured and somewhat flattering portrait of her late host. He was not only the soul of generosity and honour, — not only a man of powerful and varied intellect, — but he was naturally of a most amiable and winning disposition. Nathalie could not help demurring; she thought him cold and severe.

"My dear child," softly said the lady, "you would not think so if you had seen what I have seen; namely, Monsieur de Sainville in love."

Nathalie looked as if she longed to question; but there was no need; Madame de Jussac was willing to speak.

"It was indeed some years ago; but I assure you that he was then what he is now; the difference, if there was any, was slight. I have some experience; I have seen many men in love, but he is the only one who, to my seeming, could love deeply, passionately even, without looking foolish or ridiculous; and if you could only guess how rare, how very rare, that is!"

She said more, but her language was less clear than she who listened desired; indeed, she soon completely changed the subject, and from Monsieur de Sainville passed to Monsieur de Sainville's political opinions. She deplored that a man of his birth and talent declined devoting himself to the cause of legitimacy, and as Nathalie did not seem much impressed with this reasoning, she entered into a long and detailed explanation of the legitimist doctrines, which lasted an hour and a half. Every morning a similar conversation recurred between them, with this difference, that the name of Charles Marceau was no more mentioned, and that the political lectures of Madame de Jussac became more and more eloquent. Nathalie did not for one moment imagine that her conversion to legitimacy was the lady's object, and though expressions, which she did not then notice, but which she afterwards remembered, led her to think so at a later period, her present impression was, that her hostess had taken a fancy to her, and mentioned politics because politics were uppermost in her mind.

The day for their return came at length, and there was something in Nathalie's face as they neared Sainville, which struck even the Canoness. The young girl was always looking out of the carriage-window, admiring everything which they passed, and praising all she saw with so much warmth and animation, that Aunt Radegonde observed with much finesse, —

"Ah! Petite, you want me to think you are delighted to go home; you want me to think that you prefer our dull place to that gay château de Jussac."

"Indeed I do," very decisively replied Nathalie.

But Aunt Radegonde's penetration was not to be thus deceived, and she saw, she said, through her young friend's kind-hearted ruse. It was evening when they reached the château; Madame Marceau was unwell in her room.

"Then we shall spend the evening together in my boudoir," said the Canoness with a little selfish joy; "will you wait for me there, Petite, whilst I go up to Rosalie's room? If Armand should come, tell him he is not to go without seeing me; keep him in conversation."

Nathalie went up to the boudoir. She found everything familiar and cheerful looking, and felt glad to be come back; it seemed as if she had been, not a few days, but a whole month away. The door opened; she started, but it was only Amanda, who came in for some trifling purpose, and seemed delighted to see Mademoiselle once more. Nathalie heard her abstractedly, and felt relieved when she left. About ten minutes elapsed, the door opened again; this time Nathalie did not look up from her work.

"How industrious you are already," said the voice of Aunt Radegonde.

Nathalie looked up slowly; the Canoness was alone. She had found her niece very unwell; nothing serious, of course, still it was very provoking, for it would delay her intended journey to Paris for a month or six weeks; such was the doctor's decision. Then followed a long dissertation on illnesses in general, and on two or three very remarkable illnesses with which the Canoness had been afflicted, and during which she had been attended by Doctor Montolieu.

Nathalie heard her with such evident abstraction, that Aunt Radegonde ended by noticing it.

"I cannot imagine what is the matter with you to-night," she said, a little pettishly; "you start and jump in a very peculiar way. Are you nervous? I hope not, for when Rosalie is gone we shall have a lonely life of it; and if every sound fidgets you so, what will you do in the long winter evenings, without even Armand to come in and talk for an hour?"

Nathalie looked up.

"Will Monsieur de Sainville accompany Madame Marceau?" she asked.

"Accompany her, Petite! Why did I not tell you? How forgetful you are; I am sure I told you."

"You told me nothing," said Nathalie, laying down her work.

"What! I did not say Armand was gone?"

"Gone! No, Marraine, you did not."

"Well, he is gone, Petite; gone for the winter;—gone to Spain, I believe. I dare say he will come back next spring, or next summer at the latest. Indeed, if you can only get over your nervousness, we shall have a very quiet and comfortable winter."

Nathalie looked thoughtful, and worked on in silence.

The winter set in early. It was, as the Canoness had predicted, extremely quiet. Madame Marceau brooded over her disappointments in her own room, whence she seldom emerged. At length she took her departure for Paris, where the elegant Amanda accompanied her. The Canoness and the young girl remained alone in the château, with the servants; and never did solitude weigh so heavily on Nathalie.

Amongst the "wrongs of women," few are really more heavy and insupportable than the forced inactivity to which they are condemned in all the life, fire, and energy of youth. That thirst for pleasure, for which they are so much reproved, is only the thirst for excitement and action. They are social prisoners, and, like the enchanted princesses of fairy tales, they look down from the high and inaccessible tower of their solitude on the life and action ever going on beneath them, but in which they must never hope to join. Some, timid and shrinking, love their sheltering captivity; by for the greater number hate it in their hearts, yet, obedient to necessity, grow either apathetic or resigned: a few, more daring, or rendered reckless, break through their bonds, and throw themselves into the social strife; but for one who wins the shore, how many perish miserably!

*Ennui*, in all its dreariness, now fell on Nathalie. She regretted the school of Mademoiselle Dantin. There she had to struggle and act; — she lived. But here, it seemed as if the shadow of more than monastic stillness had suddenly fallen upon her existence. No visitors came to the château, in the absence of its master. Once, Madame de Jussac called; she looked slightly disconcerted on hearing that Monsieur de Sainville was gone. Nathalie longed for an invitation similar to that which she had formerly so little valued; but Madame de Jussac left without opening her lips on that subject, and, indeed, without uttering more than a few smooth phrases. She returned no more.

In the long winter evenings, when Aunt Radegonde slept, or indulged in monotonous speech, Nathalie thought of Monsieur de Sainville, and followed him in



his southern wanderings with something like envy. Why was he free as air, whilst she was condemned to waste her youth, and perhaps all her existence, in this forced repose? The only thing that did her good was to take long solitary walks in the garden and grounds. She came in cold and fatigued, but at least relieved for awhile of the superfluous energy which oppressed her, and made stillness of mind and body a sort of inexpressible torment. Three months thus passed away.

Madame Marceau had been gone a few weeks, when, on a bleak afternoon, Nathalie went out for her daily walk, in spite of all the remonstrances of the Canoness. She remained out about two hours, and re-entered the house as evening set in. She proceeded, as usual, to the *boudoir* of Aunt Radegonde. The lamp was unlit; but the wood fire burned with a soft and subdued glow. The young girl liked this quiet time; for then the Canoness slept, and allowed Nathalie to wander away in her inner world of thought. She now softly closed the door, came in on tip-toe, went up to the window, allowed the curtains to fall in heavy folds, which excluded the glimmering twilight, listened for awhile at the back of Aunt Radegonde's arm-chair, and, concluding from the stillness there that its tenant slept, quietly glided around it to her place, — a low seat, on the other side of the fire; then, leaning her forehead on her hand, she looked at the burning embers, and fell into a deep fit of musing. She thought of sunny Spain, — of barren plains, wild valleys, and old Moorish cities, where all night long were heard the sounds of dance and serenade.

"Have you got a head-ache?" asked a well-known voice.

She did not start, look up, or turn round; she remained in the same attitude, as if arrested thus by the power of enchantment.

"I am sure you are not well, Petite," continued the voice, now sounding like that of Aunt Radegonde.

"And I am sure, that though you change your voice, and call me Petite, you are not Marraine!" cried Nathalie, eagerly bending forward; but the arm-chair stood in the shade, and she could not see. "No matter," she impatiently added, "I know very well who you are. There! I see you now!" she triumphantly exclaimed, as a flickering light arose, and displayed the smiling face of Monsieur de Sainville, who now occupied his aunt's arm-chair, facing Nathalie. The flame also lit up her features; she looked more than glad; she seemed delighted. He amused himself for a few moments in watching her changing face, as changing as the wavering light which fell on it now. "So you are really come back!" she said, rubbing her little hands with evident glee, and not seeming in the least to think it necessary to hide the pleasure she felt at Monsieur de Sainville's return.

"Yes, I am really come back," he replied; and he did not look displeased at the evident gratification his return afforded to the young girl. It was, to say the truth, something new in his experience, to see a face brightening through his unexpected presence.

Nathalie shook her head, laughed a gay short laugh, rose abruptly, walked up and down the room, came back to her seat, and, allowing herself to fall down upon it with negligent grace, said gaily:

"I am so glad!"

"Glad of what?" he asked, as if willing to indulge himself for once in the pleasure of this *naïve* flattery.

"Glad that you are come back, Sir."

"Indeed! why so, my child?" he slowly asked.

"Because I am half dead with *ennui*!"

"Candid confession!" he exclaimed, looking, and feeling, perhaps, a little piqued.

"Indeed, Sir, it is candid. If *ennui* could kill, I should be quite dead."

"And how do you know I shall dissipate yours?"

"Oh! *Mon Dieu*!" cried Nathalie, looking much dismayed, "you are going away again?"

"No, not this winter, at least."

She looked much relieved.

"So you suffered from *ennui*?" he said.

She shook her head, and gave a rueful sigh. He smiled, and said, "Poor child!" but his smile was not very compassionate, as he asked her "what sort of an *ennui* it was?"

"A desperate *ennui*, Sir; something quite overpowering that took hold of me in the morning, and did not leave me at night."

"You found the château dull, I suppose?"

"I found it empty, Sir."

"Do you know," he resumed, after a brief pause, "that you must have good nerves? You did not seem a bit frightened — scarcely startled, on finding me here so unexpectedly."

"Because I knew your voice at the very first word you uttered; besides, it did not seem so strange that you should be there. I was thinking of you, of you and Spain. Oh, Sir, do tell me something

about it. Is it a fine country? Do you like the Spanish women? Are they so very pretty? Did you see them dance?"

"I came back through your Arles," he replied, without answering her rapid questioning.

"Arles! you came through Arles! Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

There was emotion in her voice. Without seeming to heed it, he rang for the light.

"And how did Arles look?" asked Nathalie, when the servant was gone.

"I could see no change."

But Nathalie was not content. She questioned him minutely; he answered patiently, and gave her every detail she desired, yet each reply made her look more thoughtful and more sad. When she had no more to ask, and he no more to say, she gave a deep sigh, and remained silent. Monsieur de Sainville now stood near the table, unfastening a little osier basket which he had brought with him.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said he, turning towards her, "do come and look at something I have brought from my travels."

She rose, and approached, without seeming much interested. He asked her to guess the contents of the basket. She looked at it; turned round it, came back to her place, shook her head, and said she did not know. He smiled, and bade her raise the lid. She promptly obeyed, for her curiosity was somewhat roused; to her surprise, she saw nothing but green moss.

"Look beneath," said he.

She raised the moss, and beneath it, enshrined in another bed of moss which they perfumed, she per-

ceived a bouquet of such flowers as the late season afforded. She looked up rather disappointed.

"They are for you," he quietly observed.

"For me, Sir!" she exclaimed, with a quick searching look.

"Yes; have you no idea where they come from?"

"They come from Arles," she replied, in a low tone.

She raised the bunch of flowers from their mossy bed, softly and silently, without one of the exclamations of pleasure Monsieur de Sainville had expected; looked at them for a few moments, and they seemed as fresh as if newly gathered by the hand which held them: then bent over them, silently still.

"Well!" he at length observed, "do they look genuine?"

She slowly raised her head, and looked up into his face, as he stood by her side; her face was covered with tears.

"Oh, Sir," she said, "how shall I thank you?"

He smiled, a little sadly, at her emotion he loved Sainville: but the fountain from which flew such tears had long run dry for him.

"If you only knew where I had procured these flowers," he observed, after a pause.

"What! are they not from Arles?"

"Yes; but from what garden of Arles?"

Her colour came and went; she gave him a troubled look full of inquiry, but his face remained impenetrable. At length she faltered out that "she could not tell — she did not know."

"Well, it was only in the garden of a little house that stands apart somewhere in the suburbs. There is

an old stone bench just by the porch; and in the garden behind the house is a little fountain, with laurels around it."

"My aunt's house! — our house! — the house where I was born!" cried Nathalie. "*Oh, mon Dieu!*"

She seemed unable to say more.

"Oh, Sir!" she at length added, "what have I done that you should be so very kind to me?"

She raised the flowers to her lips, and held out her hand to him; he took it and seemed to enjoy her pleasure. But when this emotion had subsided she questioned him eagerly, By what chance had he discovered that house; — for it was by chance, of course? She remembered mentioning it to him once, still she did not suppose he had taken the trouble to find it out, for it was not easy to find! She seemed so confident that it was all the result of chance that he looked slightly disconcerted, and allowed her to remain in that belief, — which did not seem, however, to lessen her gratitude in the least. Indeed, she was renewing her thanks with southern vivacity and fervour, when the door opened and Aunt Radegonde entered. Nathalie eagerly ran up to her, and told her the story of the bouquet. "How kind it was of Monsieur de Sainville to bring those flowers to her, and what an extraordinary chance had made him enter the very house where she and her aunt lived at Arles." The Canoness heard Nathalie without uttering a word, and gave her nephew an astonished look, which he did not seem to heed.

"Yes," she said abstractedly; "it is very peculiar, as you say, Petite."

She sat down in her arm-chair and looked musingly at the fire, whilst Nathalie left the room to put her flowers in water. Monsieur de Sainville, with his usual restlessness, was walking up and down the narrow *boudoir*.

"Aunt," said he, suddenly stopping short before her, "you said Mademoiselle Montolieu was quite well; — I find her much thinner, poor little thing!"

"And if she is thin, what about it?" rather shortly asked his aunt.

"It is a great deal to me as her guardian."

The Canoness looked greatly provoked, but the entrance of Nathalie checked her reply. During her temporary absence, the Canoness had been engaged in giving orders for all the rooms devoted to her nephew's use to be aired, heated, and prepared, and especially for the dinner to be hurried as much as possible. Nathalie now brought the tidings that it was nearly ready.

"Why should we not dine up here? I like your boudoir, aunt," said Monsieur de Sainville.

"Oh! how delightful it would be, Marraine," cried Nathalie.

The Canoness smiled at the idea of having a favour to grant. She pretended to hesitate a good deal and raise numerous objections, but she at length consented with much graciousness. The *boudoir* was far too small; and yet it was a pleasant meal; and when it was over, they had a very pleasant evening sitting all three around the fire. The ladies questioned Monsieur de Sainville on his travels, but he seemed to have been very little interested by what he saw, and consequently had not much to say on that score.

"Then why did you go, Armand?" asked his aunt.

"For the pleasure of coming back again, aunt; by far the most real pleasure of travelling."

Monsieur de Sainville retired early. His aunt followed him out of the room with an important air, and looked very important when she returned, in the course of a quarter of an hour.

"Petite," she gravely said; "do put by your work, I want to speak to you. Petite," she resumed, as Nathalie complied with evident surprise; "reserve is a virtue highly necessary to women, and chiefly to women like us, in the unmarried state. Now, when I came in here this evening I found you standing there, with flowers in one hand, the other hand, my child, was in that of Armand. Mind, I do not say it was wrong, but it was not quite reserved."

Nathalie coloured deeply, and did not reply at once.

"Marraine," she said at length, "it was an irresistible impulse, foolish perhaps, but certainly innocent. Monsieur de Sainville has been so kind to me, that I sometimes feel as if I were his child and he my father."

"I never knew anything so absurd!" impatiently exclaimed the Canoness: "I perceive I must open your eyes as I have been opening his. He calls you 'his ward,' or 'a child,' or even 'poor little thing.' You speak of him as of an old man. Now, my dear, if both you and he labour under this great mistake, I, a woman of penetration, do not, and I feel it my duty to enlighten you; I assure you, therefore, that Armand could by no means be your father; just as I



have been assuring him that you are neither a child nor a little girl."

"Oh, Marraine!" cried Nathalie, "how could you speak to him about anything of the kind?" She looked irritated and ashamed.

"Mademoiselle Petite," dryly said the Canoness, "allow me to say, that I am not only a woman of penetration, but also a woman of discretion and reserve. Do you imagine I said anything improper to my nephew? Do you imagine I alluded to the fact which I mentioned to you? No, indeed; but in an adroit and delicate manner I introduced your name, and hinted that though you were so childish, you were not a child, but a young and very pretty girl. He took the hint, and said quite seriously, 'I know it, Aunt.'"

A rosy blush suffused the features of Nathalie; she looked much discomposed, whilst the Canoness continued in her usual tone:

"You see, you might have relied on my discretion, Petite. Indeed you need not have been so offended at what I said. In my time, my dear," she added, glancing at her soft white hands, "a lady's hand was a rare and precious thing to touch; and the lover admitted to kiss the tips of his lady's fingers was often overpowered by his feelings, — the favour was so great. I know that in modern times relaxations have been introduced, but *I* cannot approve the principle."

Nathalie looked up, her face was flushed, and when she spoke, she spoke quickly and with eager warmth.

"Marraine," she said, "I know not if you have

lone right or wrong in speaking thus; but this I know, hat — come what may — I thank you."

She rose, kissed her, and was gone.

"Docile little creature," thought the Canoness, delighted at the result of her interference; "how she will learn in time to understand the beauties of female celibacy."

Nathalie was then in her room. She had paused in the act of undressing before her mirror, and now looked with smiling eyes and parted lips at the charming image its depths revealed. Oh! wise Aunt Rade-gonde!

## CHAPTER XVIII.

WINTER was over; but the spring was cool, and a bright wood fire burned on the drawing-room hearth. Though it was evening, the lamp was still unlit, the firelight almost supplied its place; its cheerful and vivid glow extended to the furthest extremity of the room, giving warmth to the old pictures on the wall, and light to the gleaming mirrors. The windows with curtains drawn back alone looked dark, yet, beyond them shone a few pale stars in the depths of the gloomy sky, against which, more gloomy still, waved the dark trees of the avenue.

On one side of the fire-place, but with her back turned to it, sat Nathalie on her low chair. One hand supported her cheek, the other rested on a book which lay open on her lap. She was slightly bent forward in the attitude of reading, and the light which fell on the open page, also lit up her clear and well-defined profile. Monsieur de Sainville, similarly engaged, sat

on the other side of the fire-place, but he faced the fire; the flickering light fell in full upon him; and whereas it gave a richer warmth and deeper colouring to the young girl's countenance, it only seemed to render his grave features more cold and colourless. They appeared to be alone, and neither spoke. Tired, perhaps, of the position he was compelled to assume in order to receive the light of the fire on the page he read, Monsieur de Sainville at length closed the volume and reclined back in his seat.

"Do you wish for the lamp, Sir?" asked Nathalie, in a low tone, and without looking up from her book; "shall I ring for it?"

"Thank you," he replied, speaking low like her; "it would only cause my sister to awaken; she likes this evening sleep."

Was Nathalie mistaken, or was there indeed something in the speaker's tone that justified the quick look she raised towards him? but his features no longer received the light from the fire, and she could not trace their meaning; hers assumed a surprised and puzzled expression as she glanced from Monsieur de Sainville to a sofa behind him. On this sofa his sister lay reclining in the more shadowy part of the room; the sound of her breathing, quick and oppressed like that of a person in sleep, was heard at a regular interval. Nathalie listened to it for awhile, then rose, stepped softly across the room, and placed a screen between Madame Marceau and the fire. As she was turning away from the couch she met Monsieur de Sainville's inquiring look.

"I was afraid the light might awaken her," she simply said, and resumed her seat.

He gave her a fixed and penetrating look, then once more took up his book and previous position.

Ever since her return from Paris, that is to say, for two months, Madame Marceau had been seriously ill; but this she pertinaciously refused to acknowledge. In spite of remonstrance and entreaties, she declared that she only laboured under slight indisposition; though she was compelled to keep reclining on the sofa all day long, nothing could induce her to retire to her own room; she persisted in remaining in the saloon, in order to see every one who might chance to call. Visits had never been numerous at the château of Sainville, they became less frequent every day; Madame de Jussac seldom came; yet, Madame Marceau, attired with her usual elegance, still remained in the drawing-room, ready to pay the honours of that house, of which she considered herself almost the mistress. The doctor warned, her brother remonstrated, both in vain: the sick lady shrank from taking to her bed, with a feeling that resembled horror; she seemed to entertain an instinctive and unconquerable dread of acknowledging, even thus indirectly, the fatal progress disease had made.

The Canoness acted in a wholly different spirit. No sooner did the first severe cold give her a touch of rheumatism, than she clothed herself in flannel from head to foot, discovered that the drawing-room was full of draughts, retired to her little *boudoir*, and, having caused every cranny to be stopped up, and a huge fire to burn night and day in the chimney, was in a fair way of being suffocated, when both the doctor and Monsieur de Sainville fortunately interfered. But though she submitted very reluctantly to

their advice, they wholly failed in persuading her that it would be possible for her to leave the *boudoir*, and not perish of cold. Nathalie's coaxing entreaties did, indeed, once succeed in bringing her down to the drawing-room, but after an hour's stay she went up in a shivering fit, declaring with some asperity, that unless there were a conspiracy against her life, no one would after this trial, think of asking her to come down again; which of course no one did. When she first determined on remaining in her *boudoir*, Aunt Radegonde imagined that Nathalie would be with her constantly; but Madame Marceau had since her return conceived so great an affection for the young girl, that she could not bear to have her out of her sight; she now called her "Petite," like her aunt; treated her with a kind familiarity, wholly free from patronage; and insisted on the exclusive possession of her society, to the great chagrin of Aunt Radegonde, who was thus obliged to be satisfied with the companionship of Amanda.

The elegant *femme-de-chambre*, whose life had been spent with *la fleur des pois* of the French noblesse, felt wounded in her artistic pride. Was it because she condescended to receive a salary, that her talents were to remain idle? Why she was losing her lightness and delicacy of touch with every day's inaction! This indirect appeal to Madame Marceau's sense of justice produced an increase in the yearly sum which Mademoiselle Amanda was in the habit of receiving; and which increase was considered by this experienced *coiffeuse* as a very slight compensation for the inexpressible damage she sustained in thus doing nothing. To say the truth, she was not quite so inactive as she

chose to appear, since she had succeeded in persuading Nathalie to accept of her daily services; by which means she had not only kept her hand in, but also relieved herself of a great superfluity of speech; lamenting her fate to the young girl, and appealing to "Mademoiselle, to know whether the château had not become insufferably dull?"

The château was, indeed, anything but a gay sojourn; but though she was thus secluded from every society, save that of its owners, Nathalie did not find this monotony wearisome. A time had been when she would have shrunk with terror and *ennui* from so monastic an existence; but now she found a soothing charm in its very regularity and tranquil tenor. She liked, since Madame Marceau had become kind, without condescension, to sit with her, read and play to her, to secretly perform for her those little offices which the sick lady would not, in her pride, acknowledge that she needed, but with which she could not, dispense; she liked even those dull and silent evenings by the fireside, whilst Madame Marceau slept, — evenings, which, though so quiet, had yet a dreamy charm of their own.

The room was again silent; the fire was burning low; Monsieur de Sainville stooped to arrange it; a broad jet of flame arose, and shed its light on Nathalie and her book; but, as if this light annoyed him, he drew back into the shade.

"Mademoiselle Nathalie," said he, in a low tone, "do you ever go to the garden now?"

Nathalie started slightly; but, without looking up from her book, she replied, in the same key:

"Not often, Sir."

"I thought so. In the first place, I never see you there; in the second, you have looked pale of late. Pray take a little exercise; and pray," he added, after a pause, "do not read thus by fire-light; it is bad for the sight."

Nathalie neither answered nor looked up; but a furtive smile trembled on her lips.

"I know what you mean," he continued; "but you are mistaken. I was not reading this evening; I read a page — no more; nor, to say the truth, do I imagine that you have been reading much yourself. For the last week, I have noticed the progress of your marker through the philosophical treatise in your hands; you have travelled exactly twelve pages, which makes less than two pages an evening."

Nathalie hastily closed the volume.

"Now," resumed Monsieur de Sainville, "if you were not so proud, you would long ago have asked me for something to read more interesting than that Jansenist Nicole. Since you do not seem to be aware of it, I assure you I have a well-stocked library, and if you will only —"

"Armand," feebly said the voice of Madame Marceau, "why are you in the dark?"

"Lest the lamp should annoy you, Rosalie; we will have it lit now."

He rang the bell as he spoke; the servant entered; and the lamp was lit.

"And you actually remained in the dark all this time, on my account?" resumed Madame Marceau, addressing her brother, who now stood by her couch, in the same languid tone.

"The room was not dark," said he, very briefly.

"True; besides you were always fond of sitting thus by the fire-side. Do not these evenings remind you of other evenings long ago, Armand?"

"Do you feel better?" abruptly asked Monsieur de Sainville.

"Much better; these evening slumbers compensate for my bad nights: and did I not fear they inconvenienced you —"

"If they did, I could leave the room."

"But it is like your kindness to stay. Dear Armand!" and Madame Marceau pressed the hand of her brother very gratefully. "Oh! and you, too, stayed, *chère* Petite," she added, addressing Nathalie in a tone of surprise, and half-raising herself on one elbow to look at the young girl; "I thought you were gone to see my poor aunt, whilst I slept."

Monsieur de Sainville looked at his sister; the light of the lamp fell on her pale features, over which now lingered a forced smile that agreed little with the dark, feverish, and yet eager gleam of her sunken eyes. From her he glanced to Nathalie; the same light fell on her countenance: she, too, was pale, but of the pallor that gives a more delicate and subdued grace. She had risen on being thus addressed, and now stood opposite him at the foot of the sick lady's couch, eyeing her with a kind, compassionate glance. and smiling, as she answered, quietly:

"I never imagined you would sleep so long; but I am truly glad you did sleep: it will do you so much good."

"Yes, Petite, it will," slowly answered Madame Marceau; she gently drew Nathalie towards her, made her sit down on the edge of the sofa, and taking her



hand, clasped it tenderly in hers, without seeming aware that by so doing she placed it almost into her brother's hand, which she still detained. Monsieur de Sainville, who was eyeing the fire with a fixed and abstracted gaze, never moved or turned round. Nathalie looked somewhat disconcerted, and rose quickly.

"Had I not better go and see how your aunt is?" she asked.

"Yes, Petite; she will be very glad to see you."

The look of Madame Marceau followed the young girl out of the room; her brother never changed his attitude: the expression of his features was severe, and almost forbidding.

"She is my good angel," sighed his sister. He did not answer. "Do you not think so, Armand?" she added, after a pause.

"Think what, Rosalie?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, slowly turning round, and eyeing her quietly. "Does that lamp annoy you?" he added, as she shaded her eyes with her hand: "shall I move the screen?"

"If you please; the light is painfully bright."

"Well, Rosalie, what were you saying?"

"I was only talking about Mademoiselle Monto-  
tolieu."

"And what of her?"

"She is a good child."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes, indeed, Armand, I do," said Madame Marceau, turning quickly her pale eager face towards her brother.

"Well, so do I," he calmly answered.

There was a pause. Monsieur de Sainville had

resumed his book; Madame Marceau was tossing restlessly on her couch.

"Armand," she said, at length, "you like frankness, do you not?"

"I do," was the emphatic reply.

"You will, therefore, not be offended at a plain question?"

"No, Rosalie, certainly not."

"Well, then, Armand, how do you like Mademoiselle Montolieu?"

"Very much," was the unhesitating reply.

Madame Marceau looked at her brother, and gave a sigh of relief.

"I am so glad — so very glad," she said, laying some stress on the word 'glad,' "because you see, I feared quite the contrary; — indeed, I decidedly thought the contrary. I imagined that you found her light, frivolous, and capricious; that you even thought her more heedless than her youth warrants: that you, so calm and grave, saw with displeasure those little manifestations of temper to which she is subject. I cannot tell you how glad I am to find that I was mistaken, which I was — was I not?"

"You certainly were mistaken."

"Well, Armand, you always spoke so very coldly of her."

"I am of a cold temperament."

"And rather severe. Now, I think the faults of a young girl ought to be treated with indulgence."

"Quite true," quietly replied Monsieur de Sainville; "severity towards youth is cruel."

"Besides," resumed his sister, "what are the faults of temper, when the heart is good?"

"Nothing, indeed."

"Then you think she has faults of temper?" quickly said Madame Marceau.

"I never said so, Rosalie. You remarked, 'What are faults of temper, when the heart is good?' I replied, 'Nothing, indeed.'"

Madame Marceau pressed her hand to her forehead: she looked thoughtful.

"Nothing," she resumed; "and yet, Armand, in a wife, for instance, temper is no trifle."

"Trifle!" seriously said Monsieur de Sainville; "it is the very first thing to be studied."

"Do you think so?" inquired his sister, with an anxious look; "is that your real opinion, Armand?"

"My conscientious opinion, Rosalie," was the grave reply.

"And beauty. What do you think about beauty?"

"In what sense do you mean?"

"Why, beauty in a wife; do you think it a recommendation?"

"It is an open question; I have known men who would not marry a woman that was too handsome; others who would have none but a pretty wife."

"Do you think Petite too handsome?"

"No, certainly not."

"And yet she is very pretty, Armand?"

"Precisely; that is why I do not think her too handsome."

"Well, I must say I do not admire her unconditionally."

"Nor do I."

"She is very dark."

"She is decidedly dark."

"And that curl in her lip, — what does it mean?"

"Pride."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"But pride is a great sin?" said Madame Marceau, with a look of concern.

"One of the seven capital sins."

Madame Marceau shook her head, and sighed.

"*Mon Dieu!* Armand," she gravely said; "you intrude a painful doubt on my mind; faults of temper, beauty, and pride, are dangerous gifts, and form a dangerous dowry."

"Do you think so?" asked Monsieur de Sainville, with his peculiar smile.

"You think so, Armand, do you not?" said his sister, turning towards him with an inquiring glance.

"Not in the least."

"Then I must have misunderstood you?"

"Quite misunderstood me, Rosalie."

"Then, Armand, what do you think?" she asked, with some asperity; "but, perhaps," she added, in a smoother tone, "you object to this question?"

"Not at all, I assure you. You say that temper, beauty, and pride are a dangerous dowry; I do not think so: temper produces a piquant variety; beauty is pleasant; pride is irresistibly attractive."

"Well, to be sure, how I did misunderstand you!" observed Madame Marceau, using her vinaigrette, and speaking with a short laugh; "I quite thought you had said temper was the very first thing to be studied."

"Precisely, — studied; I did not say avoided. No man has a right to expect that his wife shall be a mere machine; let him, therefore, study her temper."

"And you do not think beauty dangerous?"

"I pity the man who thinks so; I pity the man who, being free to choose between two women, equal in other respects, has not the heart to choose the handsomer one of the two."

"It would be very generous to take the plain one," ironically said the lady.

"It would be heroic, if done from a generous motive; mean and paltry, if the act of fear."

"And you do not object to pride?" continued Madame Marceau.

"I do not, when it is tempered by gentler feelings; it may, indeed, lead to much that is foolish, but it also saves from much that is false and wrong."

Madame Marceau did not answer; she had partly raised herself on her couch; a heap of cushions supported her; she looked flushed, and fanned herself with her pocket-handkerchief.

"I misunderstood, quite misunderstood," she said, very briefly; "it was my fault, no doubt, but still I perceive that I have been in the dark all along."

Monsieur de Sainville, and quietly round, and eyed his sister with a grave and earnest glance.

"I think," he quietly observed, "that you have at least been questioning me in the dark; the exact purport of your questions has so often escaped me, that I may have answered the imperfectly. I am sorry that I did not at first state plainly what I am going to state now."

His sister said nothing, but she slowly turned round, and eyed him with a fixed and burning look; he continued, looking at her as he spoke:

"Namely, that although I recognize in no person

the right of questioning me, yet I am perfectly willing to answer any such questions as it shall please you to address to me, and I beforehand give you my word that, no matter what the subject may be, the answers shall be as full and explicit as even you can desire."

Madame Marceau sank back on her seat, turned very pale, and applied her vinaigrette. Her brother took no notice of her emotion, which subsided almost immediately. Far from seeming to wish to avail herself of the privilege awarded to her, she hastily exclaimed, —

"My dear Armand, what new mistake is this? Is it possible you imagined me so indiscreet? I have, indeed, been mistaken, but very agreeably so. We agree where I thought we differed, — a true source of pleasure to me, for every day adds to my affection for Petite."

She spoke with some warmth. He rose, and said quietly:

"Then you have no question to ask of me?"

"None, Armand; none," was the hurried reply.

He left the room.

Five minutes had scarcely elapsed, when Nathalie entered. She looked at Madame Marceau; the lady was reclining in her old attitude. The screen shaded her face; Nathalie could not see whether she really slept or not. She concluded that she did, from her silence. Her step was light, and could scarcely be heard as she glided across the carpeted floor to resume her place; but instead of doing so, she paused near the table, within the brilliant circle of light shed by the lamp. The volume Monsieur de Sainville had been reading attracted her attention; she opened it:

it was a collection of treatises on subjects of agriculture, commerce, and political economy. The young girl turned over a few pages, then laid down the volume, with that curl of the lip which had attracted the notice of Madame Marceau. Her own book was lying near it; she also took it up; it opened at the last page she had been reading. She looked at it with a fixed, abstracted gaze, — scarcely the gaze of one who read; a faint tinge of colour rose to her cheek, and something like a smile broke over her features. At length, she closed the volume, and, turning round, beheld the pale face and glittering eyes of Madame Marceau looking at her over the screen. She could not repress a start; for though she often met that look, rendered more keen and fixed by the illness of her who gazed, it ever produced in her the same first impression of uneasiness, — an impression which she always inwardly reproved when it had subsided.

"I thought you were asleep," said she, approaching the couch.

"No, I was not," was the low reply.

"Do you feel unwell?" continued Nathalie; for the sick lady was ghastly pale.

"I am not well. I was looking at you: what were you reading?"

"Nicole's Moral Essays."

"Do you like it?"

Nathalie smiled demurely.

"No favourite, I see. Come and sit here, Petite, so that I may see you; — yes, so," she added, as Nathalie sat down on the edge of her couch; and the sick lady caressingly took one of the young girl's hands in both her own, and looked fixedly at the

frank and open face before her. "You are fond of reading?" she resumed.

"Very fond indeed."

"And of reading by the fire-light: it is pleasant, is it not? Well, what are you looking at?" she added, as Nathalie turned round somewhat abruptly.

"Is not that fire burning low, Madame?"

"But the room is warm, Petite; you surely do not feel cold, for you look quite flushed."

Nathalie did not reply.

"Armand likes it, too," abstractedly continued Madame Marceau; "as I dare say you have observed," she added, after a pause.

"No," hesitatingly replied Nathalie; "I had not observed, — I — I did not know."

"What! am I mistaken? Does he not sit reading there every evening?"

"I mean, Madame, that I did not know Monsieur de Sainville liked it."

"He does, Petite, — he does," said the lady, in a low tone; "if he did not, would he stay here as he stays, evening after evening?"

Nathalie did not answer: she scarcely seemed to have heard Madame Marceau. She still sat on the edge of the couch; her left hand held by the sick lady, her right supporting her cheek; her look fastened on the fire, which, notwithstanding her previous assertion, burned brightly, and seemed not on the point of dying away. She looked as she probably felt, — in a dreamy, abstracted, yet not unhappy mood, — the mood in which youth welcomes its bright fancies and still brighter hopes. The voice of Madame Marceau, always rich and harmonious, now strikingly so, and



yet not without a touch of secret sadness, broke on her reverie.

"It is a deep charm, that of old associations — deep, and yet sometimes exquisitely painful. I know not why a thought, or rather a remembrance, of the past has been haunting me the whole evening, ever since I awoke, and found the lamp unlit, and Armand sitting there reading by the fire-light, and as I had seen him many a time long ago; for it is with him an old and favourite habit."

Nathalie looked up silently, but listened, as if bound by a spell.

"Years have passed away, but the charm is still unbroken; the old habit endures. The hearth, that to others looks joyous and bright, is to me as a spot haunted for ever by a secret presence. Is it harsh to wish that the dead should be forgotten, and effaced from human memory? Yet, if I could, I would do this; and had I the power, the fabled Lethe should yield its deepest draught, and quench the fever of one wearied spirit."

She no longer seemed to be addressing Nathalie, and spoke in a tone so low, that the young girl could scarcely catch the last words, though, slightly bending forward, she listened with eager attention. She looked round, and gave Madame Marceau a searching but unavailing glance; the meaning of that face was not one she could read. There was a long silence. At length, Nathalie left the couch, drew a chair to the table, and resumed her book; but after reading a few pages with feverish haste, she closed the volume and took up her embroidery. It failed, however, in rivetting her attention; for ere long, she laid it by, rose from her

seat, and went up to one of the window recesses. After remaining there some time, she returned to the fire-side, and standing on the hearth-rug, looked long and fixedly at the burning logs of wood. When she turned round, she again met the look of Madame Marceau, who seemed to be eyeing her attentively.

"Petite," she softly said, "you do not look well this evening. I fear this is a very dull life you lead here. Alas! what has youth to do with those who have unhappily lost all sympathy with its feelings. My poor child! we are too old, too grave, too sorrowful for you."

"Too sorrowful, Madam!" said Nathalie with a faint smile, but a somewhat wistful and anxious glance.

"Yes, Petite, too sorrowful," gravely replied the lady.

Nathalie looked at her almost inquiringly, but Madame Marceau averted her glance and spoke no more. She retired early, supported out of the room by Amanda, and leaving the young girl alone as usual.

It was a habit she had taken since the illness of Madame Marceau; there was for her a charm, deep, though undefined, in the solitary possession of that old drawing-room, where no one ever came after the sick lady had retired. In order to secure herself against intrusion, Nathalie had even asked and obtained, that the task of extinguishing the lamp, and of allowing the fire to die slowly away on the hearth, might be left to her care.

The most sociable minds, those whom the quick animated converse delights most, often turn to solitude, with feverish and impassioned longing. There was to Nathalie something painfully oppressive in the

constant society of Madame Marceau. It was not that the lady spoke much, or that her discourse wearied—far from it; she spoke little and seldom, on trite subjects; but she was there, ever there, with her quick restless look still following every motion of her young companion; and there came moments when Nathalie longed to be away, when she thought of dark and lonely places, as a prisoner thinks of escape and liberty—when her spirit literally thirsted for an hour's communion with solitude. When that hour came at length, she enjoyed it with a pleasure only the more keen from being so brief. There was an old arm-chair, vast enough to contain her entirely; she ensconced herself in its deep recesses, extinguished the lamp, buried her head in her hands, and listened to the dull monotonous sound of the winter rain pattering against the window-panes, or to the spirit voice of the wind, now low and deep like a stifled plaint, now rising loud and wrathful, as if holding angry contest with some foe like itself, mysterious and unseen. Sometimes a strange and not unpleasing fear came over the mind of the young girl: she looked up chill and shivering; the fire was low, the room looked vast and indistinct, the ceiling seemed lost in its own height, the mirrors opened deep vistas into endless and mysterious chambers, extending far away, all filled with the same solemn and shadowy gloom. But Nathalie was not superstitious; this obscurity awed but never terrified her; she was indeed conscious of a slight degree of fear, but of a fear which she subdued, and which there was even a certain pleasure in thus subduing. Gradually the feeling vanished; she thought no longer of falling rain or murmuring wind, of sha-

dowy chambers and legendary lore, but she listened invariably to the wonderful and endless romance, which her own thoughts had framed from the dreams that haunt the brain and trouble the heart of longing and ardent youth. And every evening that tale, with its imaginary scenes, passions, and characters, became more deep and thrilling; but on none did it seem to draw nearer to a close, as vague and mysterious as the unknown future it shadowed forth to the dreaming girl.

But this evening was not spent like the rest: the lamp was not extinguished, the chair was not drawn forth. Nathalie sat on the couch where Madame Marceau had been reclining, and her look wandered slowly over the whole room, as if it were a place that look beheld for the first time. This quiet *salon* was very old; it had known many guests — masters they might call themselves, and be called by others, — but what were they, save the guests of a few years, who silently departed one by one, to be replaced by other guests, whose sojourn was as brief, whose memory was as speedily forgotten? This had been the scene of their chief passions — vanity and pride; chief, but not all, for surely many a story of man's gentler feelings was linked with that old room, with that silent hearth near which Nathalie now sat, a lonely and dependant girl. She shaded her eyes with her hand; broken words, whose meaning she had devined, hints which she had been apt to read, had long ago told her a tale which her own thoughts had since then repeated to her many a time, seldom so forcibly as now. A picture rose before her, greeting that inward eye, which may be the torment, as well as the bliss, of solitude; and never

did limner's art draw outlines more distinct, or paint hues more vivid. She saw the old hearth: the fire burned brightly; it cast its changing light to the furthest end of the room — it illumined its deepest recesses; but above all, it fell on two, — a youth and maiden, who both sat near it. Nathalie knew that pale and severe face, even though it was younger than now, with fewer lines of care on its brow, and something more kindly in its glance. And the maiden, too, she knew; for her features, though never beheld by actual sight, were not yet unknown. She knew that serene brow, shaded by fair clustering hair; those soft blue eyes, those parted and smiling lips, that neck of swan-like grace; and never, as she sat there in the firelight glow, did fairer and more ideal vision greet a lover's enamoured gaze. Nor did he, who now looked on her, seem cold or unmoved; words fell from his lips — words which she who looked on could never hear, strive as she would, but whose meaning she read in the maiden's downcast look and blushing cheek. Here the dream ceased abruptly.

"I believe I have forgotten my book," said a calm voice.

Nathalie looked up with a sudden start: it was Monsieur de Sainville, who had entered unheard, and now stood near the table on which lay the book he had been reading. He took it up, opened it, and marked some passages with a pencil. The perfect seriousness of his manner, as he stood there, wholly wrapt in his occupation, and without so much as looking towards her, at once restored Nathalie to composure. He at length closed the book, turned away from the table, but had not gone away more

than a few paces, when he came back again, and said:

"Mademoiselle Montolieu, I have a favour to ask of you."

Nathalie looked up.

"A favour, Sir?"

"Yes, a favour; but you must promise beforehand to grant it."

"No promise is needed, Sir," she ceremoniously replied; "since it must be something quite out of my power for me not to gratify you."

"Well, then," said he, without seeming to heed her reserved manner, "promise me that you will not remain so closely confined to this room as you have done of late. I have noticed with concern the change in your appearance; you are now habitually pale, which is not natural to you: you are extremely pale this evening. Pray be careful; it is at your age that the seeds of future disease are often unconsciously sown, — that the health, grace, and bloom of youth are often lost for ever."

"But I assure you, Sir," hesitatingly replied Nathalie, "that I am not ill."

"No, you are not; I know it: but you are preparing for ill health. When do you leave this room, seldom or ever? I want your promise, your word, that this shall not continue."

Nathalie did not answer.

"What! do you refuse?"

"No, Sir."

"Then will you give me your word to take a walk to-morrow?"

"Very well, Sir; I give you my word that I will."

She spoke in a low tone, without raising her look or changing her attitude; nor did he glance towards her. He stood on the hearth-rug, one elbow leaning on the low marble mantel-shelf; his look fixed on the mirror, which gave back the whole room from its furthest extremity to the motionless figure of the young girl. He eyed her thus somewhat thoughtfully. He was not in error, when he said that Nathalie was changed; she had grown both thin and pale, and as she sat there, the drooping languor of her attitude struck him forcibly. An anxious expression overspread his features; he seemed on the point of addressing her, when something he saw in the mirror attracted his attention.

"Come in," said he so abruptly, that Nathalie looked up at once.

He had turned towards the door; the contraction of his brow, though slight, yet announced displeasure, as the door opened and admitted Amanda.

"Why did you not come in at once?" he briefly asked.

"I was afraid of disturbing Monsieur," replied Amanda, ever cool and self-possessed.

"Is Madame Marceau unwell?" inquired Nathalie, rising.

"No; Madame was not worse, thank heaven. Madame had only left her vinaigrette, and sent her for it, lest she should want it in the night."

But the vinaigrette, though sought for everywhere in and under the couch, was not to be found.

"*Mon Dieu!*" observed Amanda, with great simplicity, "I should not wonder if it were in Madame's room, after all."

Another fruitless search convinced the *femme-de-chambre* that such was the case, and with a neat little apology for her intrusion, she left the room. From the moment of her entrance Monsieur de Sainville had resumed his book, and he did not look up, either during the search, or after Amanda's departure. Nathalie, who felt slightly embarrassed by the continuance of his presence, resumed the search — which was not, however, very sincere — for the missing vinaigrette.

"Do not give yourself useless trouble," said Monsieur de Sainville, quietly looking up, "I now remember, that when I left my sister's room before coming down here to look for this book, I saw that vinaigrette lying on her dressing-table. Amanda will see it the first thing on going in."

Nathalie gave him a quick look of surprise, but his countenance was perfectly calm and composed: he closed his book and continued —

"I hope you will not forget your promise."

"No, Sir, I shall not."

He bade her good evening, then suddenly came back, and observed:

"But pray do not take too long a walk, Mademoiselle Montolieu; you are not very strong; besides, it is air, not fatigue, that you want."

He was gone; the door closed behind him; his receding step was heard, then ceased; but Nathalie did not move from the spot where she stood, wrapt in a dream-like trance. She pressed her hand to her forehead, and sought to recall the picture his entrance had broken; but the outlines were indistinct and dim — the hues had faded away. Instead of the youth,



she saw the serious, yet kind face which had looked on her awhile ago; the maiden who had seemed so fair, was now a pale vision, as colourless and dim as the past of which she formed a part. On that loveliness, erewhile so bright, had fallen the dark Lethal-like shadow of forgetfulness and the grave.

## CHAPTER XIX.

THE following morning was mild and sunny, and no sooner had Nathalie entered the drawing-room, than Madame Marceau said so, and urged her to take a walk. "It would do her so much good."

Nathalie assented with some surprise at the unusual attention. Scarcely had she left the room, when Monsieur de Sainville received a message from his sister, who wished to speak to him. When he came, she apologized in a tone of concern, "for interfering with his morning walk, for she knew this was his hour; but she wished to speak to him on a matter of interest;" and again she apologized "for preventing his morning walk."

"As I am going to Marmont, it is of no consequence," said he, taking a seat and assuming a listening attitude.

But the communication Madame Marceau had to make to her brother will appear afterwards.

Before proceeding to the garden, Nathalie called on her old friend. She found her disconsolate and shivering by the fire-side.

"What a mild, sunny morning!" cheerfully said Nathalie.

"Mild! All the mild weather was gone for ever.

**The world was getting older every day, and as for the sun —”**

Nathalie interrupted her by drawing back the curtain, and the sun poured in a light so radiant, and a warmth so genial and penetrating, that the Canoness, fairly beaten on that point, retrenched herself within the position, “that the world was growing older and older every day.”

Nathalie placed on the little table, by Aunt Radegonde’s arm-chair, a vase full of fresh spring flowers; mute yet eloquent protests of the ever-renewed life and freshness of nature.

“They will die,” said the Canoness; “everything must die; it is not only older the world gets, but more dismal every day.”

Nathalie began to sing a gay Provençal song, — gay, yet not without a touch of old romance. The sounds stirred the emulation of Aunt Radegonde’s canary, which raised its voice in loud and angry rivalry. Amused at the contest, Nathalie quickened her singing; but the faster she sang the faster did the canary pour forth his notes in brilliant succession, until at length the Provençal song was finished, and, in his own esteem, the bird remained victor.

“There!” cried Nathalie, turning her flushed face and sparkling eyes towards the Canoness; “the sunshine, the flowers, the very bird himself, bear witness against you.”

“Oh! Petite, it is you, who are better than sunshine, flowers, or bird in a house,” the Canoness observed; and the unnatural gloom which had of late overcast her features, gradually left them as she looked at the young girl, with her brow so clear, her

look so hopeful, her smile so bright, and around her lingering still all the delightful warmth and radiance of her years. She would have added, "happy he who shall have so gay and cheerful a creature!" had she not felt checked by the memory of her antimatrimonial exhortations.

"And the book, *Marraine*?" coaxingly said Nathalie.

"Yes, I have looked for it, and there it is on the table. It was Armand's copy once, and he was very fond of it, as I told you; but it puzzles me to think why you care for such dry reading."

"I have long wished to read it," said Nathalie, eagerly slipping a small duodecimo into her pocket.

"Well, you may have it; I should not lend you a novel; but maxims can do you no harm."

The face of the Canoness fell when she perceived that the young girl was not going to stay; but she was comforted when Nathalie kissed her, and promised to call in the evening.

The morning was lovely, the garden looked green and beautiful, and, as Nathalie ran lightly down the gravel-walks, she wondered in her heart if Aunt Radegonde spoke truly: if the world was indeed growing old! To her it had never seemed so fresh and young as on that spring morning. After wandering a long time over the garden and the grounds, she came to the green-house. It was Monsieur de Sainville's favourite resort, but the hour for his walk was past; Nathalie, therefore, lingered there without fear of meeting him.

After admiring, leisurely, the fresh and fragrant flowers gathered together, she sat down on the low

stone seat afforded by the embrasure of the arched window. It had been partly opened to admit the genial breath of noon-day to the flowers and plants within; an almond-tree growing outside intercepted the sunbeams, and threw its light waving shadow on the features of Nathalie, as she reclined back, looking idly out, watching the shadows that passed swiftly over the waving grass, and listening to the low voice of the wind passing through the rustling branches of the neighbouring pine-trees.

She had not been long thus when she suddenly remembered the book she had taken away. She quickly took it out, and looked eagerly over every page; now pausing long over some passage, now passing on hastily, and still looking graver as she read. The volume which she thus perused on that spring morning was not one of those tales of love or wild romance, the delight of youth, and often, too, of maturer years, but one of the most dreary and mournful records ever yielded by the history and experience of a human heart, — the *Maxims of La Rochefoucauld*. A few of the maxims were underlined; three of those thus designated struck Nathalie: —

“A man may love like a madman, not like a fool.”

“There are few women whose merit outlives their beauty.”

“True love is like spirits: spoken of by all; seen by few.”

“What! still reading Nicole?” said the voice of Monsieur de Sainville.

Nathalie looked up; he stood smiling before her. She coloured; hastily jumped down from her seat, and in her haste dropped the book. He picked it up, and

immediately looked up into her face, with a glance both searching and surprised.

"La Rochefoucauld! you read La Rochefoucauld! And the copy looks well worn, — a favourite author, no doubt. Oh! you true daughter of Eve! could you not wait for such bitter fruit?"

There was slight bitterness in his tone, as he spoke thus, turning over the pages of the volume. Something he saw struck him.

"Where did you get this book, child?" he asked, in a wholly altered tone.

"From Madame de Sainville, Sir."

"My aunt! A strange relic for her to keep, and a strange book to lend to you." He very deliberately put the volume into his pocket, looked up, and steadily eyeing Nathalie, said, in a tone between jest and earnest:

"I confiscate La Rochefoucauld. Though this copy has not been in my hands for years, it is nevertheless my property; besides, I do not wish you to read it. For heaven's sake, keep to all that girls delight in; leave La Rochefoucauld to graver heads, older minds, and sadder hearts. Keep, I pray, to novels and poetry, — the proper food of eighteen."

A disdainful smile curled Nathalie's lip, as she replied:

"Novels, poetry, and so forth are the sweetmeats, the *bonbons* fit for us poor girls of eighteen! How flattering!"

"You crave stronger food? Be satisfied, you shall have it soon, — much too soon."

She did not answer. He continued:

"I have deprived you of your book: allow me

then to send you something from my library this afternoon."

"Novels and poetry?" demurely asked Nathalie.

"Yes; novels and poetry. Do you imagine I never read either? Why, the intellectual repast must always have a dessert."

"And the dessert is, of course, fit for a girl of eighteen!" observed Nathalie, in a quick, nettled tone.

"Nay, as to that, you may have all, if you like. Do you incline towards political economy, or take any interest in agriculture? Are you pleased with statistics? Pray choose. I regret not to possess any interesting works on history, or some amusing books of travel; but I have little faith in historical lore, and have travelled too much myself to care about the travelling experiences of others. My books are thus either very grave or very light. Which do you prefer?"

"Whichever you please, Sir. Some interesting discussion on the manufacturing system; or on the best method of fattening cattle; or on the present plan of cultivating land in small farms; — anything, in short, equally instructive, elevating, or delightful."

"You are resentful. Seriously, did you like La Rochefoucauld so very much?"

Nathalie shrugged her shoulders carelessly; "she did know; she had not read much."

"Did you wish to read more?"

She felt perfectly indifferent on that subject.

"I am glad to hear you say so. This book, true in some respects, false in others, could only taint the freshness of your mind. Had I simply warned you against it, you would have sat up all night, sooner

than leave it unread. I took it into custody at once; for I know that you have too daring and inquiring a spirit to be deterred by trifles; — witness the adventure of the berries.”

She did not reply. She stood before him, with blushing and half-averted face; one hand supporting her cheek, the other stripping a fine laurel of its leaves. He stood between her and the door, and seemed to enjoy her embarrassment. There was a brief silence.

“What are you doing to my poor laurel?” he suddenly exclaimed.

Nathalie started, turned round, and seeing the floor covered with the leaves of the injured shrub, she looked up, with a frightened glance, into Monsieur de Sainville’s face. He assumed a displeased air; and she tried to look remorseful.

“Do you use shrubs thus?” he asked; “if so, how shall I protect mine?”

“Lock the door, Sir.”

She glided past him, and stepped out, as she spoke.

“Judicious advice, which cannot too soon be followed,” he replied, following her out, and locking the door of the green-house.

Nathalie looked disconcerted, as he composedly walked by her side. In her first moment of confusion, she had not taken the path leading to the château, but a sheltered avenue of firs, in a contrary direction. The ground was bare of grass, but the fallen foliage of the firs rendered it as soft and warm as a carpet; golden gleams lit up the dark trunks and darker masses of those northern trees, in harmony with the chillness latent in the air of this spring morning. Seeing that

her companion did not speak, Nathalie resolutely opened the conversation by alluding to the beauty of the weather, — that fertile topic in doubtful climates. He smiled, but did not answer.

“There is something very pleasant in the quiet freshness of Normandy,” she continued.

“You like Normandy?” said he, with a keen, inquiring glance; “you, — a native of the south, accustomed to a warm sun, and its deeper dyes; — you admire our green little province, so calm, so commonplace?”

Nathalie looked surprised at this slighting tone.

“I understand,” he resumed, interpreting the expression of her countenance with his usual ease; “why do I stay in a place about which I seem to care so little? Well, if I remain here, it is not precisely because I like Normandy, or even Sainville, though both are endeared to me by family recollections; it is because I know, my child, that it is good for the home of man to be like his happiness, — common-place and calm. Have you read enough of La Rochefoucauld to agree with me there?”

Nathalie did not choose to answer the latter remark.

“Normandy is beautiful,” she said; “yet I should prefer a purer sky and a warmer sun.”

“You like the south: so do I; but not to reside in. That endless revel of nature, with skies ever blue, and air ever balm, enervates the soul. Man is not himself, when he has nothing against which he may strive. Life is not, or should not be a day of summer sunshine, to be spent in voluptuous enjoyment. Have you never, in imagination, contrasted a



soft southern climate with the desolate north, with icy seas blending at the horizon with skies scarcely less black? Have you not thought of those solitary and rock-bound shores, of those wild and barren regions seen through the falling snow; where the sun looks pale and dim as the moon of our temperate regions, where a plant can hardly grow, and man can scarcely dwell, but which have a solemn and melancholy charm that lives in the memory, when the verdant earth, the serene sky, and azure seas of the south are forgotten?"

He spoke with a fervour verging on enthusiasm.

Nathalie eyed him wistfully.

"It must be very cold there, Sir," she said, with a slight shiver; "I like the sun — the sun of the south, I mean."

"That is to say, not the sun of our poor Normandy."

Nathalie did not answer.

"Now, seriously," he continued, "what is there amiss with our province? Its verdure is noted; it is a green, pleasant nook enough; and if the sky is sometimes overcast, there are plenty of dwellings to give shelter. Take Sainville, for instance; you like Sainville, do you not?" he abruptly added.

"Yes, Sir," she replied, somewhat coldly; "I like it."

"But not too much, evidently. Is it the château you object to?"

"No, Sir; the château is very fine."

"You speak quite coolly; what is there amiss in that poor château?"

"Nothing, Sir."

"And what have you to say to the garden, or to the grounds?"

"Nothing, Sir."

"Nothing! Oh! my child, do not say that. Like Sainville, — I want you to like it."

He spoke with so much warmth, that he stopped short. He took her hand, and looked down at her eagerly. She turned very pale, and trembled visibly. He smiled.

"Do not look so frightened," said he, gently; "but come in here: I want to speak to you."

A spell seemed on Nathalie: she yielded like a child, as he made her enter the recess of the sleeping nymph, which they were just then passing by. On seeing where they were, he stopped short, released her, and cast a gloomy look around him.

"Oh! Petite, Petite!" he bitterly said, "what brought us here!"

"Is not this a pretty place?" asked Nathalie, endeavouring to look composed.

At first he did not reply.

"You like it!" he said, at length; "do not; the shadow of death is on it — a shadow nothing can remove. Look at that nymph! Her's is no earthly sleep — it is the sleep of the funeral genius I once saw on an ancient tombstone in Italy, and whose brow, though wreathed with flowers, looked oppressed with something more heavy than mere slumber. You like the sun. When does it penetrate through those yews and cypresses — fit trees for what is little better than a tomb?"

He spoke with impatient bitterness. There was a long pause, broken by no sound save the low splash

of the fountain. Nathalie looked at Monsieur de Sainville, at the nymph in her ivied niche; she listened to the low murmurs of the falling waters, and seemed to be eagerly seeking, from all she saw and heard, the key of some half-devined mystery.

"Yes, I like this place," she observed, at length.

"It does not sadden or oppress you?"

"No; why should it?"

"True; why should it? And yet the eternal splash of that fountain is strangely monotonous, and the breath it sends upon the air is very chill. See, *your* hair is covered with spray."

"I find it cooling to the brow, and pleasant to the ear."

"But it will end by depressing you at length."

"I am not easily depressed."

"No, poor child! I dare say you have made the best of the little happiness that came in your way."

He was looking at her kindly, yet sadly.

"It is so difficult to be miserable for a long time," she said.

"Yet you had your troubles?"

"Hope upheld me with a nameless trust in some unknown good still to come."

"It was not hope: it was the freshness of your years; the inexperience of youth, which knows *not* life for what it is: a weary burden — a dark captivity."

"I do not believe that, at all!" cried Nathalie; "it is too hard to believe," she added, colouring at the vivacity with which she had spoken.

"Ay, hard, indeed — but too true."

"But surely, Sir," said Nathalie very earnestly 'there is such a thing as happiness?"

He did not reply.

"However brief it may be," she continued, hesitatingly.

"And what happiness can be called genuine, that does not endure? From the moment we know it must end with life, is not the longest happiness miserably brief? Oh! that thought that all must die and everything perish! Like the skeleton guest of Egypt's ancient banquets, it haunts every mortal festivity."

He spoke sorrowfully. Nathalie eyed him wistfully.

"Why should one look at that skeleton, or think of death?" she asked in a low soft tone. "It is of itself so hard to believe in, so easy to forget. Oh! when the sun shines so brightly, when the air is so pure, the sky so blue, the whole earth so fair, may not one sometimes imagine, looking at that beautiful universe, of which, however insignificant, we yet form a part, — why should it not endure thus for ever?"

She looked at him; he drew her arm within his.

"My poor little thing," said he, "death will overtake you as it overtakes us all; with years that pass like days, and treacherous stealthy steps that fall on the ear unheeded and unheard. Fresh and fair as you are now, you too must share the fate of earth's most glorious and most lovely things; you too must pass away and fade, and die."

The low and mournful cadence of his voice thrilled through the heart of Nathalie. She looked up into

his face with a fixed glance and parted lips, in a sort of serious and rapt attention. Far from saddening her, his words had only brought a deeper hue to her cheeks and a softer light to her eyes; there seemed to be *for* her joy, and no gloom in the mournful images he had called up. She smiled to herself, like one who beholds some fair inward vision.

"No matter," said she, pressing her hands to her bosom, whilst the smile still lingered on her lips; "no matter; there is happiness still!"

"I hope so," he replied in his usual tone. "But you are shivering; it must be this chill place."

He led her away; they ascended the flight of steps in silence; he paused before a sunny bench on the first terrace.

"Let us sit here," he said, "and continue our argument. Why do you not like Sainville?"

"I never said I did not like it, Sir," replied Nathalie, startled at this abrupt remark.

"But you spoke very coldly. Look at it! Does not the old chateau look warm and bright in the sunshine, with the blue sky beyond? If you were to live here long, would you always be regretting Provence? Believe me, forget Arles; and like Sainville."

"I like Sainville, Sir." She spoke so low that the words were well-nigh inaudible. They both sat on the bench, he stooped to hear her better, when a discreet cough in the neighbouring alley announced the approach of Amanda.

A mutual impulse made them rise. Nathalie became crimson. Monsieur de Sainville looked *pale* and angry. The lady's maid came up with a thick shawl on her arm. "Madame fearing lest Made-

moiselle should take cold on this chill morning, had told her to bring her this."

"Rosalie is thoughtful," quietly observed Monsieur de Sainville; "and now that you have that shawl, will you not take another turn around the garden?"

He took her arm as he spoke; but Nathalie disengaged it quickly. She coloured, hesitated, stammered, and at length replied that she felt tired and would rather go in. He did not seem quite pleased, but raised no objection. He went in through the library. She entered the château by the front entrance, and immediately proceeded to the drawing-room.

"Have you had an agreeable walk?" asked Madame Marceau. She had half-raised herself on one elbow to look at Nathalie. The shawl had fallen back, and no longer concealed her figure, once so full and stately, now shrunk and wasted by disease. The curtains of the drawing-room shut out the clear light as usual, but their crimson hue fell in vain on her pale features, rendered more pale by the feverish glitter of her sunken eyes.

"Yes, Madame, a very agreeable walk," replied Nathalie.

"But solitary. What a pity!"

"I met Monsieur de Sainville," said Nathalie, in a low tone.

"Indeed! I thought him at Marmont. Where did you meet him?"

"In the green-house."

"His favourite resort: yours, too, I suppose?"

"By no means," drily replied the young girl.

"Well, Petite, do not put on that serious face.

Just lay by your work, and let me look at you. Ay, so. I have a question to ask: what did Armand say to you?"

She again raised herself on one elbow. Nathalie coloured deeply, and looked disturbed; but she did not reply.

"I thought so!" indignantly exclaimed the lady, sinking back on the couch. "Well," she sharply added, "you do not answer!"

"I might refuse to answer," said Nathalie, rather haughtily; "but it is not worth while. Monsieur de Sainville spoke to me only on the most general subjects."

"And on none in particular?"

"Oh! yes," negligently replied Nathalie; "on the north, the south, and so on."

"What do you mean by so on?" asked Madame Marceau, with a short laugh.

Nathalie looked up, so flushed and irritated, that the lady softened down immediately.

"Petite," she said, "you are vexed. I will make no apologies; but put your hand here," — she took her hand, and laid it on her heart, as she spoke, — "and here," she added, making her feel her hot and throbbing wrist; "then ask yourself if the fever, which wastes life at that rate, leaves the mind calm, and the temper smooth?"

"You have a strong fever; let me send for the doctor," exclaimed Nathalie, appeased at once.

"I am not ill; mine is a fever of the mind no doctor's art can appease. I was very absurd awhile ago; but when I learned you had met Armand, I concluded

he had been repeating to you what passed between him and me, just before he went to the garden."

"I am not in Monsieur de Sainville's confidence," gravely replied Nathalie.

"But if what passed between us was about you?"

"About me!" exclaimed Nathalie.

"Come, I see he has been discreet. So much the better. Men mar where they meddle. Do not look so disturbed; I cannot explain myself for a few days yet. This much I can tell you: Armand makes me miserable. We never quarrel; but we are always jarring. But why should I complain? He is to me what he has been to every one — to himself first of all — inexorable. I am ambitious; it is in our race. Yes," she added, with her old pride rising, "ambition and will are in the blood of the Sainvilles. Have I not that for which I may well be aspiring? You have seen my son; he is young, handsome, and full of talent. Think you he would not make a fit representative of the old family honours? Come, be frank," she added, with a penetrating glance; "do you not think he would?"

Nathalie looked embarrassed, in spite of herself.

"Child," returned Madame Marceau, smiling, "why do you blush? What mother can resent that which she herself feels so deeply? We will have no explanations," she added, perceiving that Nathalie looked disturbed; "I proceed. Do you not think my son would bear the old name with all due honour? You do; but his uncle, but my brother," she added, with much bitterness, "does not."

Nathalie had too long suspected this, to look surprised.

• "You do not seem astonished," suspiciously said



the lady; "then he has told you after all! Come, confess it."

"Madame," replied Nathalie, in an accent that carried conviction with it, "he has never even hinted this to me."

"Forgive me, Petite; I am strangely sensitive on this point. But to return. Do you think my ambition, hope, dream, — call it what you will, — so extravagant? Could not that which has been done for the most noble families of France, be done for ours? We should have no Rohans, no Richelieus, if the salic system had been carried out. Did not the niece of the great Cardinal marry her music-master? and the last daughter of the Rohans fall in love with Chabot, the cadet of Gascony, and by marrying him, perpetuate a name otherwise doomed to extinction? But reason, example, and argument have proved unavailing; he has refused — absolutely refused. And on what plea? — why, on the plea that the name he has, by so much sacrifice and labour, saved from disgrace, shall not be perilled again!"

She ceased. A crimson spot burned on her pale cheek: she looked feverish and excited. Nathalie, who had heard her with deep attention, now said, quietly:

"But how can Monsieur de Sainville prevent his name from being perilled again? If he should marry, for instance?"

Madame Marceau turned slowly round on her couch, looked at the young girl's attentive face, smiled, turned back again, and muttered to herself, "Marry! Armand marry! Petite," she resumed, in her usual tone, "you surprise me! I thought every one knew my brother would not marry. You may imagine that if I did not,

**know this, as I know it, I should never have hinted to him the propriety of my son assuming a name which would have been the exclusive right of his own children. And so,"** she added, turning round again, and giving the young girl a fixed and piercing gaze, **"so you really did not know, or even suspect, that Armand would never marry?"**

Nathalie did not answer.

**"How strange!"** continued the lady, laughing, and seeming much amused; **"excuse me, Petite; but the idea of Armand marrying, is to me so peculiar. Very."** She laughed again. **"And so,"** she resumed, when this mirthful fit was over, **"so you never noticed his constrained politeness to us poor women! So you never noticed how he sneers at our little follies; how impatient he is of our weakness: how little he cares to disguise his real opinion of us — namely, that we are weak, frivolous, inconstant, incapable of real or high feeling — toys to be trifled with in a light or idle hour: no more? And so you never noticed how he mocks at love and marriage, and so forth; and yet you have been here a whole winter, Petite?"**

Nathalie remained silent.

**"You see,"** said Madame Marceau, **"it was my knowledge of this solemn vow — and when was Armand ever known to break his word — that made me hope. But when I mentioned this to him this morning, he destroyed that hope at once, by merely saying, 'No, I must be the last of the name.' But I must and will be just: Armand spoke very kindly of Charles, more kindly than I could have expected. 'Of course,' he said, 'he shall be my heir; let this comfort you, Rosalie. I hope he has too much good sense**

to care about the name of De Sainville; at all events, I know a way to render the disappointment less bitter. I have been a cold, stern uncle till now, but I may befriend him in a manner he little expects.' But how pale and languid you look, Petite! I fear you are not well; you are too much shut up — you want long walks, like this morning. I hope you will continue to like Sainville: we want you to like it. Let me tell you that you are a great favourite. Ah! if you knew the plans we have been making to prolong your sojourn here?"

Nathalie rose abruptly; she turned pale and flushed by turns; she fastened a searching and burning look on the sick lady.

"Madame," she exclaimed, "do you mean to say that Monsieur de Sainville meant —"

"Do you expect me to tell you that?" gaily interrupted the lady, with a playful wave of the hand; "no, Petite, woman as I am, I can keep a secret."

Nathalie sat down, but she soon rose again; she looked disturbed and anxious. Madame Marceau laughed, and asked if she did not think herself the victim of some deeply-laid scheme? In vain the young girl sought to ascertain anything positive; she only received hints as vague and delusive as the gleams of light that glance on the changing wave. She felt dazzled, but never enlightened.

This lasted the whole day, for Madame Marceau would not allow her to leave her. Towards evening she fell into her usual slumber. Nathalie sat near her, alone. The lamp was not lit; but the curtains had been drawn back from the central window, whose wide arch framed a quiet picture of the summits of

dark trees, that seen thus, looked like the outskirts of some forest solitude. Above, in the blue silent sky, hung the moon, the votive lamp of nature's wide temple suspended there throughout eternity. The room was still; a soft pale light fell on the floor: the evening was mild — the fire burned low, with a faint smouldering light. Nathalie felt oppressed and weary; she turned towards the quiet scene which the window revealed — it looked a calm, peaceful region there, delusive she knew, for it was only the dusty road that spread beyond, and yet even that delusion soothed her. The words of David, "Oh! that I had the wings of a dove, that I might flee away, and be at rest," came back to her heart. For awhile a dream bore her away on its swift pinions; the freshness of dark places seemed to fall on her wearied spirit; the cool drink of some icy fountain wave, to soothe her inward fever. She rose softly, and glanced towards Madame Marceau. The invalid did not move; her breathing remained regular and low: she complained of restless nights, but her evening sleep was always heavy and deep. Nathalie had all day been longing to go up to Aunt Radegonde; she now thought she could escape unheard, and return before she had been missed. She glided softly towards the door, opened it, closed it noiselessly, and found herself face to face with Monsieur de Sainville, on the landing. She wanted to pass by him; he detained her.

"Why did you not come down to dinner?" he asked.

"Madame Marceau made me dine with her."

"What is the matter? Your voice does not sound

as usual; has there been anything to trouble or annoy you?"

His tone was brief, his look keen and penetrating; she averted her face without replying.

"Let me know what it is, I beseech you."

His voice was unusually kind and soothing. Tears trembled on the lashes of her downcast eyes.

"Let me know it, I beseech you," he said again, lowering his voice so that no passing servant might overhear his tones.

Before Nathalie could reply, the drawing-room door opened, and Madame Marceau appeared, with her pale face and glittering eyes on the threshold. The subdued light of the lamp, held by the marble slave, shone on their three faces.

"Petite," said she, in a brief abrupt tone, taking Nathalie's arm as she spoke, "why did you leave me? you know I have a horror of remaining alone ever since I am ill."

"And you are ill, very ill to-night," observed her brother, with something between anger and pity on his countenance, as he watched her agitated face and trembling frame, — "come in, Rosalie."

He made her release her hold of Nathalie, took her arm and led her into the drawing-room, closing the door behind him. Nathalie went up to the *boudoir* of the Canoness.

"Oh, Petite! how glad I am you are come," eagerly said Aunt Radegonde; "I have been so dull, but now I shall be all right again; for you know what I said this morning: you are better than sunshine, flowers, or bird in a house."

The young girl smiled faintly, but silently sat

down on a low stool at the feet of her old friend. Five minutes elapsed; she did not open her lips. The Canoness stooped, made her raise her face so that it met her own attentive gaze, and exclaimed, —

“How pale you are!”

“I have a bad head-ache.”

There was another long silence.

“Marraine,” suddenly observed Nathalie, “is it true that Monsieur de Sainville has taken a vow never to marry?”

Her look was rivetted on the features of Aunt Radegonde. She dropped her knitting and turned very pale; her features worked, her lips trembled, and her eyes dimmed with tears.

“Yes,” she replied in a broken tone, “he has taken a vow never to marry.”

Nathalie rose much disturbed; her features were scarcely less agitated than those of Aunt Radegonde. She walked up and down the room with hasty and uneven steps: at length she paused near the chair of the Canoness, and gently laying her hand on the arm of her old friend, she said, in a remorseful tone, —

“I have been cruel, — forgive me.”

“My poor child, you could not know all that such a question called up.”

“Yes, yes, I know it,” exclaimed the young girl, in a broken tone; “I know it but too well.”

The Canoness wheeled back her chair to see her better.

“Petite,” she said, “you mistake; you know nothing.”

“Nothing!” bitterly replied Nathalie, and she

clasped her hands, and again walked up and down the room.

"Petite, what do you know?"

Nathalie shook her head without replying. A hectic flush overspread the features of Aunt Rade-gonde.

"You must tell me, you must," she exclaimed with unusual warmth.

"And where shall I find the words that will not grieve you?" asked Nathalie with deep sadness. "How shall I say that I know the sad story of one whose image is in this room, who was lovely, and destined to happiness, and who suffered so much through another, who is also dear to you."

"He is not, he is not!" passionately cried the Canoness; "I have never forgiven him in my heart; I never will forgive him. I hate myself sometimes for residing under his roof and eating his bread; yes, I hate myself, I do."

Nathalie eyed her with a troubled look. There is something strange and impressive in the impotent wrath of age, — that last lingering spark of a dying fire. On seeing the gentle Canoness so strangely moved, the young girl began to understand the strength and depth of the resentful feeling which had slumbered all along.

"Do you know," continued the Canoness, in the same excited tone, "that she was dear to me as mine own child; that she was a poor motherless orphan; the daughter of a loved and only sister; that I brought her up here in this house, and that for sixteen years she never left me. That she was beautiful as the day. and the gentlest creature that ever lived; that to see

her was to love her, and that but for one hard heart she might be with us still, — a joy to all, a blessing to me. You weep; you feel for her. God bless your kind heart; — say, was not her's a hard fate? He came back in time; her father relented, but *he* would not; his pride — that pride which will bring down a judgment on him yet — would not let him relent or forgive. He allowed her to be married to another almost before his eyes. She died of a broken heart; *he* lived on calm, prosperous, and happy."

The colour had repeatedly changed on Nathalie's cheek as she listened to Aunt Radegonde. Her hands were nervously clasped together; her look was feverish; in a voice she vainly strove to render calm, she said, "How do you know he is happy? how do you know he does not suffer?"

The Canoness gave her a dreary look.

"To suffer, he should have a heart, and it is not a heart he has, but a stone. I always warned my poor child not to like him; but youth is rash and she would not be warned. She might have found many another suitor, for she was very lovely. That portrait is her very image. Look at her! My aunt Adelaide was beautiful, no doubt, but never half so beautiful as my own Lucile. She never had that fine silken hair my hand has smoothed and caressed so often; she never had those soft blue eyes that have looked up into mine with a smile, — many, oh! many a time."

She ceased; her tears were falling fast. Nathalie looked at the two portraits: at the dark and at the fair beauty; at the face that had the colouring rich, warm, and yet soft of some old Venetian master; at the other calm countenance, with the lovely, but pale



outlines of a Raffaele head. She compared them: Adelaide de Sainville looked very beautiful, but when she turned from her to the serene face, it seemed as if that bewitching, but still earthly beauty faded away as mortal and perishable, before the pure and ideal loveliness of Aunt Radegonde's lost niece.

"Oh, Marraine!" she exclaimed, in a low tone, "if he does not suffer, remember, and regret, why that vow?"

"Pride, child, — pride. Once deceived by woman, he will not be deceived a second time."

"Hush," quickly said Nathalie.

Her ear had detected the well-known step; the door opened, Monsieur de Sainville entered. The Canoness looked disconcerted; Nathalie agitated. He eyed them keenly from the threshold of the room; closed the door deliberately; came forward and excused himself in his customary calm tone, for not having warned his aunt of his visit.

"It is no matter, Armand — no matter," she replied; but her voice quivered, and her hands trembled as she resumed her knitting.

Her nephew glanced from her to Nathalie. The young girl had risen; she avoided his look, took up a book lying on the table, turned over a few pages, closed it, and left the room without speaking.

"Aunt," abruptly asked Monsieur de Sainville, "what is the matter with Mademoiselle Montolieu?"

"She has a bad head-ache."

"Nothing else?"

His look was piercing; but the Canoness calmly replied:

"No, Armand, nothing else that I know of."

"There is something going on to-day in this house, which I cannot understand," he said impatiently. "What is it? You look surprised. Well, I dare say you know nothing about it. Listen to this, however: Petite is unwell; she wants a walk, make her — you can if you wish — take one to-morrow."

"Certainly, Armand," answered the Canoness, with much alacrity, for she felt this concern in one whom she loved, soothing and complimentary. As a sort of *amende honorable* for the harsh feelings she had been cherishing against him, she added, "and I am very much obliged to you, Armand, for the interest you take in Petite."

A peculiar smile played around the pale firm lips of Monsieur de Sainville as he received these thanks, and looked down at the little, but erect figure of his aunt.

"Petite!" he echoed, "what tempted you to call her so; she is not short?"

"No, certainly; but there is something slight and airy about her. She is not one of those women, for instance, who fill a room; a sort of woman I never could endure," emphatically added the Canoness.

"Petite," as you call her, "is certainly not one of those ample ladies; but she can fill a room with noise. Was it not her I heard singing here this morning, or Amanda, perhaps?"

"Amanda!" indignantly exclaimed his aunt; "do you imagine, Armand, I would allow my niece's *femme-de-chambre* to sing in my room, in my presence?"

"I thought you liked that girl," replied her nephew, eyeing her fixedly; "she is a good deal with you."

"But I keep her at a distance, — at a great distance," emphatically said his aunt.

"Then it was Mademoiselle Montolieu who sang?"

"Yes, she was as merry as a bird this morning; but this evening she scarcely opened her lips."

"She is not well; I saw it at once," returned Monsieur de Sainville, with a brief expression of anxiety. "I hope you will tell her to take a walk to-morrow morning."

"Be quite easy, Armand," said the Canoness, with a shrewd nod; "I shall tell her to walk up and down by the river-side; there is a fine breeze there."

"A great deal too fine," quickly replied her nephew; "besides there are workmen engaged there now; it would annoy her."

"Then I shall make her promise to keep to the first terrace, where the sun is so warm."

"Let her choose her own walk, aunt," he said, somewhat impatiently, "she will enjoy it more."

There was a pause; Monsieur de Sainville bade his aunt good night, walked to the door, and suddenly came back; he drew La Rochefoucauld from his pocket, and put it on the table.

"I found Mademoiselle Montolieu reading this book this morning," he said, briefly; "I took it from her; it seemed a pity that the freshness of so young a mind should be tarnished by such bitter lore. Why did you not lend her some tale, or novel, aunt?"

"A tale, a novel! Armand; and to a young girl?"

"Why not?" he composedly asked; "I suppose that no tale or novel in your possession would be unfit for her reading! And I believe it is for youth those books are most proper."

"That is not my creed," firmly said the Canoness.

"Aunt, novels are very harshly treated; they are simply a want of our imaginative faculties, which must and will be satisfied. Youth must have romances, or, what is far more dangerous, it will make to itself romances of its own. But that is not the question; I return this book to you because it is from you it was had; it was mine formerly, but I do not value it now. *Apropos*," he carelessly added, "you may induce Mademoiselle Montolieu to prolong her walk, by telling her that a fine azelia has arrived this afternoon, and is now in the green-house."

"An azelia!" cried the Canoness; "well, then, I think I shall venture out with Petite to see the azelia."

"No, pray do not," very quickly said her nephew; "there is still a very keen breeze out."

And when he again stood near the door, he turned round to say, very seriously, —

"Aunt, promise me that you will not go out to-morrow."

The Canoness gave the required promise.

"He is kind, after all," she thought, when her nephew was gone, and willing to gratify him at once, she rang the bell. Amanda made her appearance.

"I wish to see Mademoiselle Montolieu," said the Canoness, in a distant tone, suggested by the recent conversation.

"I am sorry to inform Madame, that Mademoiselle Montolieu, being troubled with a bad head-ache, has retired to her room."

"Then I must see her when she comes down to-morrow morning. Mademoiselle Montolieu is my com-

panion, and I must say I think the way in which my niece usurps her society is quite preposterous. I never can see her. I shall expect to see her to-morrow morning; I have an important communication to make to her. It is quite necessary Mademoiselle Montolieu should take exercise, and there is something in the green-house she is expected to go and look at. I must have a conversation with Mademoiselle Montolieu on that subject."

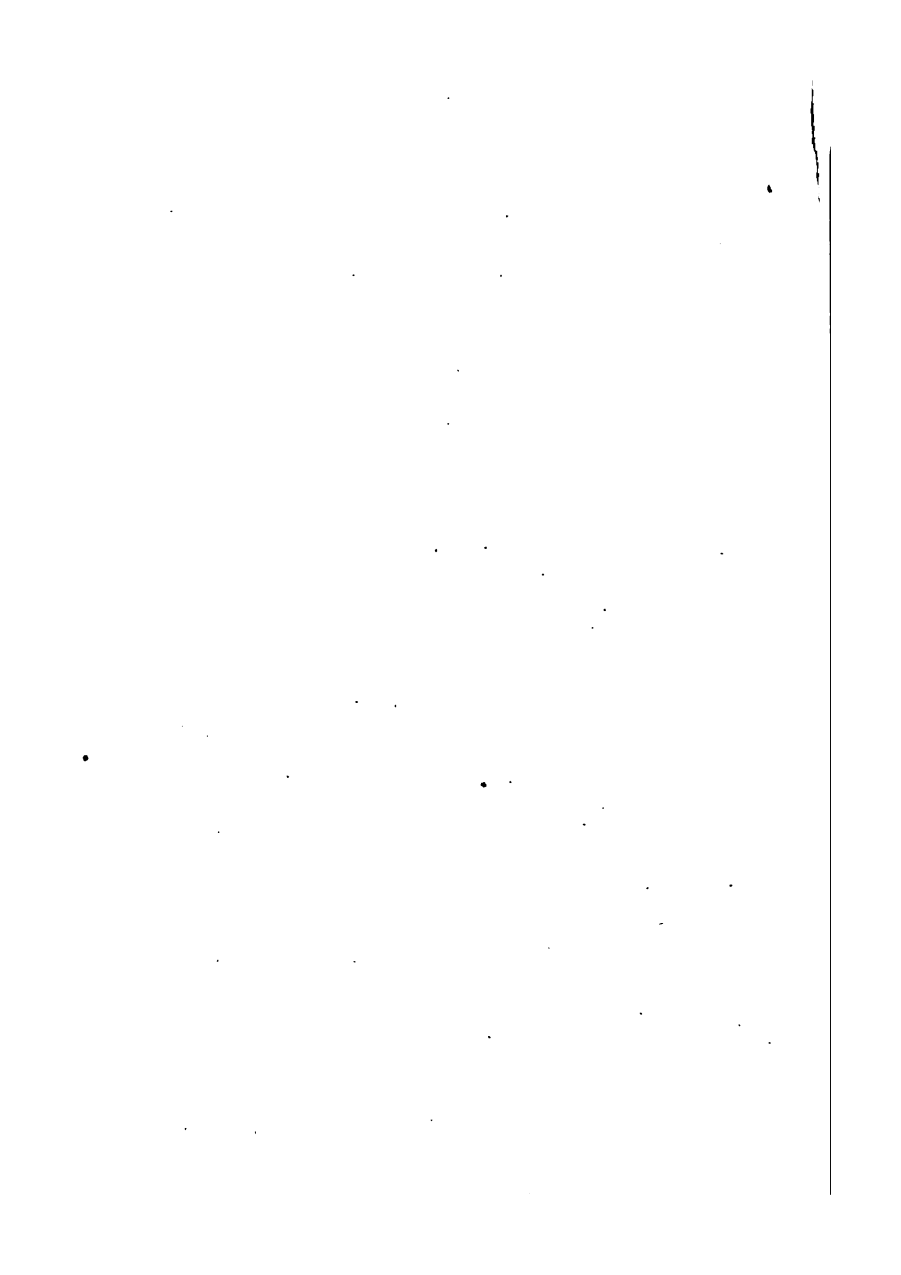
And with a dignified wave of the hand Amanda was dismissed.

END OF VOL. I.

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